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"'WILL YOU LEAVE ME, MY LEAM?'"

Page 188.

[*Frontispiece.*]

THE ATONEMENT

LEAM DUNDAS.

MRS. E. LYNN LINTON.

AUTHOR OF "PATRICIA KEMBALL," "JOSHUA DAVIDSON," ETC.

[illegible]

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THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS.

By MRS. E. LYNN LINTON, AUTHOR OF "PATRICIA KEMBALL."

PART I.

CHAPTER I.
NORTH ASTON.

TO those who admired the kind of thing it was, North Aston was one of the loveliest places to be found in England. It was indeed an ideal bit of English scenery, best described in its summer aspect, when the golden meadows were rich with flowers and the odorous woods were kingdoms of unknown treasures full of the mystery of life and loveliness. In winter it was barren and desolate enough, but in summer it was an Eden—a place to make the dwellers in towns and stony places traveling on the high-road that overlooked, but did not enter the valley, sorrowful for the one part and envious for the other—a place where it seemed only logical to expect a human nature void of passion, and a society in fitting harmony therewith.

It had everything to perfect a landscape. There was the clear trout-stream winding through the fields and woods, giving the sentiment of travel and a beyond as it flowed through the home from some secret sources, then passed away to lands unknown. Two miles down, the valley suddenly straitened to a narrow gorge, where the road had been made side by side with the river by cutting into the rocks that rose on either side, now cleft into rifts where the sun never shone and the white threads of falling water never ceased, now thrown forward in overhanging masses like great gray bones projecting from among the trees and ferns.

Up the valley the high lands broadened into a breezy moor, purple with heath and heather, peopled with bird and beast, whence could be seen—as things in a dream, perceived but not belonging—the spires of cities and the smoke of distant railroads, the mansions of the great and the tall chimneys of factories; to the left the line of blue hills like a veil of vapor; to the right the shimmer of the sea like a belt of silver against the sky. Down below were the green pastures where herds of kine, sedate and ruminant, stood knee-deep in quiet pools or stood by the meadow gates lowing for the milking-pails. Fields of yellowing grain were starred with blood-red poppies and ox-eye daisies, purple cranesbill and the shining disks of marigold—beautiful to sight if unprofitable for husbandry; the hedges were sweet with roses and woodbine in the summer, bright with berries in the autumn; stately forest trees, like lords of the land, overshadowed field and fence at intervals; and more rare flowers grew about North Aston than elsewhere in England. In like manner more rare birds and insects were to be found here than elsewhere, and the quiet little village only wanted its local Gilbert White to be rendered as famous as was ever Selborne. But the chief pride of the place was the old ruined castle of Dunaston on the heights commanding the gorge. Originally one of the strongholds of the county, it was now a mere ruin abandoned to tradition and decay. "The duke" to whom it belonged cared for nothing that did not bring him absolute profit or its equivalent in pleasure. He kept his modern shooting-box on the moor weather-tight and well provided, but he let the grand old castle crumble year by year and stone by stone till little beyond fragments of the outer walls was now left standing; and soon there would not be enough even of these to shelter the ghost that still lived there.

For of course the castle was haunted: how should it not be? The young bride of low degree, whom the cruel lady-mother had done to death three hundred years ago in the good old way of walling up alive in one of the upper dungeons, was to be seen at times flitting through the ruined arches and across the grass-grown court, wringing her hands in the moonlight, wailing shrilly in the storm—

an evil omen enough to whomsoever it befell, for how many had not seen it and suffered in consequence? It would have been safer for a man to deny the story of Lot's wife, or that the sun stood still in the Valley of Ajalon, than to cast doubt on the ghost of Dunaston. He who should so deny it might never hope to hold up his head again in the place, nor to shake off to his dying day the name of atheist, and consequent reputation of an evil-doer. The Dunaston ghost was the fetish of the place; and fetishes are sacred.

The village set in the midst of this lovely, sleepy scenery was little better than a hamlet, and had no more commercial conveniences. But as all the land was owned by one or two large proprietors who would not sell for building purposes, and who would have considered the place defiled had a mill or a manufactory risen within cannon-range of their preserves, the villagers were bound to accept what was given to them, and to make no complaints of what they could not alter. The market-town of Sherrington was full nine miles away; the roads were bad, and North Aston was on the way to nowhere; trade there was none; movement there was none; but it was a lovely place to look at—and the æsthetics have their uses.

All the same, if it was such a place as poets love to write of and artists to delineate, it was one also where the poor, stagnating in mind and fortune, live, toil and die, very little removed from the beasts they pasture, and where the wives and daughters of the resident gentry, beating themselves like birds against the wires of their cages, spend half their lives in bewailing the dullness of the other half.

There was the village smithy, where they discussed the local news and hammered out clumsy shoes that lamed the horses; the village mill, where the best local business was done, bad enough when at the best; and the one general shop which sold everything in a way, and that a poor one, but which was considered sufficiently good for the villagers by the gentry, who got their grocery from Piccadilly and their millinery from Bond street; and there was the one beershop, the supervision over which was strict and the hour of closing early, with repeated threats from the rector, as senior magistrate, of the loss of license should there be too much noise or any drunkenness. Indeed, the need of the "Wellington" was scarcely seen at all by the gentry, who laid down their pipes of wine discreetly, and let their barrels of beer mellow in their ample cellars till they became fit drink for the gods. There were the stately mansions of the few families constituting the local aristocracy standing on the slopes in favored places, turned to the sun and sheltered from the wind; and in the bottom, among the swamps and drainage, a clustered handful of ill-ventilated, ill-constructed cottages, mostly picturesque and all unserviceable—the thatched roofs, brown and mossy, letting in the rain; the rustic porches, which had been given by the landlords to look pretty and make a picture, with ivy and creepers running up the trellis, harboring insects and mildew; the small lozenge-paned windows that did not open, keeping the rooms close and foul,—all artistic and unhealthy, lovely to look at and bad to live in.

But it made a pleasant picture for the great people to admire from the windows of their spacious rooms, and the girls liked to sketch the "bits." When the miller, one Jonathan Dobson, got leave to slate his roof in place of the rotten old thatch, and so by degrees transformed his picturesque, rustic fever-trap into a square, ugly, comfortable little dwelling, there was quite a commotion at the Hall where the Harrowbys lived. The thatched, ivy-grown cottage had "composed" in the most perfect manner from their windows, and they regarded the slated, ugly, comfortable little dwelling as in a manner an infringement on their rights, and a piece of impertinence from the miller to his superiors.

North Aston was a village which might stand as the model of superior control. It had neither village rowdyism nor village immorality, and knew as lit-

tle of religious dissent as of political independence. Even the blacksmith was a decent fellow who went to church with the rest, and the very tailor was a good conservative, and in no wise tainted with free thought. No mute inglorious Milton had ever questioned of fate, free-will or the sanctity of marriage at the smithy forum, and no village Hampden had been known to hold treasonable discourses concerning the rights of man or the wrongs of the poor at the alehouse on the green. No one thereabouts had inconvenient aspirations or nourished subversive discontents; and since the year 1817, when a godless ruffian, who had returned from the wars a worse man than he went into them, had murdered his sweetheart for jealousy in Steel's Wood, not a crime beyond the pettiest form of petty larceny or a scolding match between two shrews had sullied the simple annals of the place. It was as much the perfection of rustic order as of rustic beauty—a little community of ignorant, unambitious men and women strangled in the grasp of superiority. They had not energy enough to be even vicious, certainly not energy enough to be discontented, but accepted their pinched and deadened lives as of the unalterable ordination of Providence, thinking it hard sometimes when work was slack and food scarce, but comforting themselves with texts bearing on patience and the Lord's will. They were proud, too, of their local aristocracy, and accepted them as superior beings whom it was only right and righteous should be endowed better than themselves, holding it part of their religion to pay them worshipful obedience, and to keep the tenth commandment when they contrasted circumstances and conditions.

Of this small community the rector was naturally the immediate lord and head. To be sure, the real lord of the manor was the duke, to whom the whole of the land belonged with few exceptions; but the duke was like the czar to the Russian peasant, too far off for human needs, and for all practical purposes the rector held them in leash. Domination was part of his prerogative, and he was a man who did not disdain prerogatives. The living was worth about a thousand a year, and the population of the parish was not more than three hundred souls, all told. They were precious plants in the ecclesiastical vineyard as times go, when many a man is paid perhaps not one-third that sum for cultivating twenty times as many. It would have argued bad husbandry if they had not been kept well pruned, if not fruitful, at such a cost to the clerical treasury.

The rector, however, was neither very solicitous nor very sanguine about his vineyard. He took his income as his right, and he gave his services as a grace subject only to the control of his diocesan; but he thought the souls in his charge would be neither better nor worse for the cessation of his ministrations, holding them as too wooden on the one side and too brutish on the other to be much improved by anything man could say. He had the gentleman's contempt for his inferiors, and the comparatively educated man's scorn of crass ignorance. Christian as he was, he clung to his own interpretation of the "many mansions," which he held to be the allotment of celestial lodgings, first floor or basement, according to present conditions, haughtily disclaiming the doctrine of equality even in Paradise, and often saying, "Do you think such a man as Jonathan Dobson and I can be equals?"

Good as his pay was, he was not inclined to think his lot as the sleepy pruner of these sapless straggling plants too enviable, and could never be brought to confess that his lines had fallen in pleasant places. And indeed it was one of the deadest, dullest livings to be found within the four seas—one of those placid, stagnant pools which the great waves of progress and commerce have left undisturbed, and where the hand of time stands where it stood fifty years ago. True, there were such modern innovations as a foot-post who did his eighteen miles a day from and to Sherrington, the market-town, and whose business was almost wholly with the gentry; and a railway station at Aston Bar, eight miles off. But the echoes of the world without

that came to North Aston by these means were very few and faint, and the life that drifted there down into eternity was life of the least eventful kind known to man.

The place contained but five families of position, without any of those indeterminate quantities, that intermediary fringe connecting the high and low together, found in large communities. There had once been a person of this kind, a certain Miss Snelling, a retired milliner, always called "poor Miss Snelling" by the ladies when they spoke of her. Poor Miss Snelling had of course never been admitted into anything like equality by the great people, but each house had made it a point of Christian charity to send her a bunch of grapes in the season, and the ladies asked her up once in the year to afternoon tea when no one else was there, and they thought they might as well do their duty and get it over. As she had been a humble and grateful kind of person, who never forgot her shop manners of deferential obsequiousness, she had been the more readily recognized as a kind of inferior sister in the Lord; and because she made no efforts to assert her claims to a common humanity, but was willing to be treated as a worm if they were so minded, she slipped into a position resembling that of a petted lady's-maid, sometimes patronized, sometimes snubbed, but not suffered to decline the one or to resent the other method of recognition made according to the mood of her social superiors.

But Miss Snelling was dead now, poor soul! and her pretty little cottage, marked "Lion Hut" by the ordnance surveyors, but called "Lionnet" by the people thereabouts, was empty, and likely to remain so. It was the property of Mr. Dundas of Andalusia Cottage, but, pretty and enticing as it was, no candidate for its tenancy had yet come forward, and Lionnet was the one sole vacant habitation, and the one sole habitation of the second class, to be found in the district.

So that the place contained in reality but five families of position, as has been said, not counting the duke when he came to the moor in the shooting season, nor the various magnates to be found at the distance of twelve or thirteen miles.

These five families were — the rector and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Birkett, with their only daughter, Adelaide; the Harrowbys of the Hill — Mrs. Harrowby quite recently a widow, with three daughters and two sons, of whom Edgar, the elder, was at present with his regiment in India, and Francis, the younger, practicing at the bar in London; Dr. and Mrs. Corfield, and their son Alick, at Steel's Corner; Mr. and Mrs. Dundas, with their little daughter Leam, at Andalusia Cottage; and the Fairbairns of the Limes—a large family of boys and girls, six of a sort, ranging from a young man, Cyril, at college, to a baby in the cradle. These made up the gentry of North Aston—at the best a small society of major gods in their leafy Olympus, and one that promised but few elements for dramatic story.

CHAPTER II.

WHO LIVED THERE.

THERE was nothing very remarkable about these people. The rector, a handsome, irresponsible kind of gentleman, with a fine figure, a high nose and a small head—who looked fitter to have been the colonel of a crack regiment than the priest of a church founded by a handful of Jewish communists — had taken orders because North Aston was a family living, and it would have been flying in the face of Providence to refuse the bread already buttered for him. His life had been, in consequence, the life of a man who, having failed his natural vocation, has never reconciled himself to that which he has undertaken per force. He had done his duty in a perfunctory and spiritless way, satisfied with peace and never seeking after improvement. He had a profound contempt for the poor, and considered them hopelessly degraded; but at the same time he held that they, the many, must be kept degraded for the good of us, the

refined few. "Society wants these ignorant wretches groping in dirt and darkness," he used to say with his martial air. "The world has never yet got on without its helots, and never will; and they are only fools or knaves who seek to abolish them."

Yet he was not unpopular in the place where he drew his ten hundred a year, and left his three hundred souls to struggle to the light as they best could. On the days when he was free from gout he spoke to his ragged sheep with the good-natured familiarity of a high-handed gentleman condescending to his inferiors; but when his 'twenty-seven port played tricks with his blood, then there was a general uncorking of the vials of wrath which made his presence a service of danger rather than of joy. He had uncorked a good many in his day, and had the reputation of being a "tight hand," whom nine times out of ten it was better to avoid than to meet. The truth was, he had fretted greatly in his time at his uncongenial lot in being bound for life to the *corvée* of North Aston, for even nepotism could not promote to ecclesiastical honors a man with a head so narrow and a temper of mind so martial as his; but he was quieter now at sixty years of age, having gradually subsided into that kind of lazy acquiescence which is born of habit and diminished energies — the optimism of indolence and an enlarged waist.

His wife, who was his second venture in the matrimonial lottery, was a placid woman of good family—sweet-tempered, inactive, ruled by her servants, and invariably five minutes too late. The people, however, liked her, for though she seldom visited or spoke to them, she was pleasant when the chance came; and the servants at the rectory did not stint the broken meat. Their daughter Adelaide was a pretty, well-bred girl of about twenty, with straw-colored hair, light-blue eyes, and a skin of the traditional strawberries and cream — a girl of soft manners and determined purpose, whose gloves of velvet, triple pile, covered hands of steel tougher than Bessemer's.

Mrs. Harrowby of the Hill was the British matron as found in country places, narrow, strict, innocent of the real world in which she lived. Her standing sorrow was the still unmarried condition of her three daughters, whose non-success in going off she attributed, not unreasonably, to the departed Mr. Harrowby. He had been one of those men with large patriarchal proclivities and an aversion to change, who like to keep their children still children to the end, and who hold themselves personally aggrieved when the young people begin to cast about for stray straws fit for nest-building on their own account. He used to look at his three girls with a kind of Turkish spirit of domination mixed up with his English pride of paternity, saying half blusteringly, half affectionately, "I would knock any man down who dared to ask me for one of them!" his coat-tails over his arms, his back to the fire, and his bull-dog face flushed with the warmth of his place and his feelings combined. Thus, by keeping them at home and shutting the house-door against probable aspirants, he had so effectually prevented all chances of marriage while there was time that now it seemed scarcely likely the young ladies would be sought for at all, seeing that they had but small portions, were lean and faded, and held the restricted views of life belonging to virtuous country maidens over thirty, to whom tobacco is a vice, and whist for five-shilling points and a guinea on the rubber a sin almost as heinous as the advocacy of cremation; to whom races are synonyms with iniquity, and billiards at a public table the ultimate to which low-bred immorality can go; elder sisters who call their brothers of five-and-twenty "boys," and believe that they live in London and India the lives of little girls at school. The youngest of the three, however, Miss Josephine Harrowby, was by no means so rigid as her sisters. She was plumper in body as well as softer in disposition, and often laid herself open to the rebukes of the elder two by the habit she had of sighing and her absurd love of babies.

Then there was Dr. Corfield of Steel's

Corner—"old Dr. Corfield," as he was always called, though he was but fifty at the present time. He had long given up his professional practice, and now passed his days in making chemical experiments, devoting himself especially to the study of poisons, of which he had an extraordinary collection — a man bound up in facts which he cared only to collect, never to group; to analyze, not to synthesize. Nevertheless, he was kind-hearted though unsocial, and trustworthy, because so taciturn as almost to justify the theory of the Mute Man; always ready to do his best in cases of emergency and before the doctor from Sherrington could be brought. Else, as has been said, he never now practiced the profession he had studied more as a science than a profession, and which his wife's fortune had rendered unnecessary.

This wife of his, "Sarah Corfield" to her friends, was a shrewd, bustling, energetic little person of spontaneous activities, with bright brown eyes and a sharp nose, fond of managing her neighbors' affairs and great at giving gratuitous advice. She had skimmed the surface of many pursuits in her day, from homœopathy to cooking, and from spiritualism to millinery, with excursions into art and literature by the way not quite so successful as the rest. Therefore she took it on herself to advise her more ignorant sisters on all things under heaven and on earth, with an accent of certainty not without its value. She was at once the torment and the salvation of the North Aston poor, being the only person who looked after them practically, who sent runagate little ones to school, insisted on household cleanliness, and fought against open ditches and typhoid fever. The women dreaded her worse than the plague when they saw her come down the hill in her little basket carriage, with a supply of tracts and flannel at her feet, but they had it to do; and as she administered her medicine in syrup, and donated while she scolded, they were fain to accept the one for the sake of the other, and to conceal their wry faces under a mask of gratitude.

But shrewd as she was in the ordinary affairs of life, in one thing she was as foolish as others; and her maternal instinct overpowered her good sense quite as much as it overpowers the good sense of women whose foreheads are narrower and whose noses are blunter than hers. Her son was the apple of her eyes, the crown of her treasures, the living shrine before which she poured out her heart in unbounded devotion. To keep him what she called pure—that is, ignorant of the world, and therefore unable to avoid its dangers or to use its opportunities when the time came for him to do both—she had kept him closely tied to her apron-string all through his boyhood, and now in his young manhood of twenty years he was tied there still. She held the absolute equality of the sexes in all things, save granting greater strength of muscle to the inferior, and claiming higher moral perceptions for the superior; and she carried out her principles, not by enlarging the boundaries of woman's place, but by dwarfing that of man's. She saw no reason, she said, why a boy should not be reared on exactly the same moral lines as a girl, and could not be brought to confess a sex in virtue. What was good for the one was absolutely good for the other, and she would concede no liberties to the one which the other might not share.

As her husband never knew how time or history went so long as he might be left in peace in the laboratory with his experiments, she had it all her own way with Alick; and Dr. Corfield congratulated himself on the possession of a wife so clever that she could live his life as well as her own, and fulfill their joint duties creditably.

The result was a tall, large, raw-boned, awkward young man who knew all manner of useless things, and none that could be turned to practical account—a young man whose painful shyness, innocent ingenuousness, homely features and ungainly manners made him the butt of the young people whenever he appeared among them. But his mother loved him with a blindness of affection that saw no demerit anywhere; and he loved her

with a simplicity of reverence that was, however, sometimes sorely tried when she drew those apron-strings of hers tighter than the young fellow liked, and insisted on treating him as a child when he felt the strength of his boyhood stirring powerfully within, and on holding him close as a girl when the freer instincts of the fledgling man would naturally have driven him farther afield. She never saw that she galled him. He carried the sacrifice of himself and his instincts of freedom as his offering of gratitude and love, and bore his chagrins, which were not light, with the dignity of patience and the cheerfulness of courage. In some things the most transparent, Alick Corfield was in others the most obscure of all now living at North Aston. Every one thought him weighed and measured and fathomed to the bottom, but there was one whole side of his nature entirely misunderstood, and even his mother did not suspect the fund of poetry and passionate chivalry that lay like fruit in blossom in his heart.

The Fairbairns at the Limes were just a healthy, open-air, breezy set of folks, taking life as a perpetual holiday, where the sun was ever at noon and the tide at its height, holding the faith that whatever is is right, and that people who come to grief of their portions are either weak or wicked, or may be both; that this is the best of all possible worlds to those who know how to live in it; and that we have but to keep out of debt, take plenty of exercise, and tub vigorously to make all things come square at the end. What else, indeed, should be the philosophy of folks married happily, with abundance of money, faultless digestions, and a large family of boys and girls, bright, brave and handsome?—folks whose velvet coats had no seamy sides, whose family cupboards held no concealed skeletons, and whose silken ropes were free from frays and knots. What life was to the Fairbairns they assumed it ought to be to every one else, and, because they were exceptionally favorites of Fortune in their own persons, maintained that it is in the power of every one who chooses to grasp the slippery wheel and turn the golden spoke uppermost. If any one failed, then had he not deserved to succeed, for success follows merit as surely as light follows the sun, and the doctrine of ill-luck or undeserved mischance was all moonshine. Thus, as virtue is always rewarded, and it is vice alone that gets put in the pillory, the poor, pitiful theorist on elemental rights and the justice of apportionment only wastes his time when he questions the inevitable. It was a comfortable doctrine, looked at from their breezy heights, but it was not always satisfactory to those lying maimed and crippled in the lower levels.

All these were, as we can see, the ordinary constituents of ordinary English society, neither better nor worse than what may be found in hundreds of places. But at Andalusia Cottage, where Mr. and Mrs. Dundas lived, things went a little out of the common groove. For it is not often that an English gentleman, living at such a place as North Aston, brings home for his wife a superbly beautiful Spanish woman with the face of a sibyl, the temper of a fiend, the habits of a savage, and ignorance to correspond. This, however, was Mrs. Dundas summarized, and as the small world of North Aston had known her for fifteen years. She was the one misfitting fragment in this well-ordered social mosaic, and it was evident that nothing now could trim her into the shape she ought to take. It was in vain that Mrs. Corfield tried to indoctrinate her into the art and mystery of English middle-class housekeeping. To the end she never knew the parts of speech pertaining to the butcher or the grocer, and would eat nothing that was not redolent of garlic and slab with oil.

Mrs. Harrowby, the social chieftainess with whom all the North Astonians tried to stand well, wished to teach her the rudiments—not to go farther—of English good-breeding. Pepita listened in silence, her big black eyes fixed with a kind of stony tragicality on the speaker, but none the more did she obey instructions. She still went about in the morning in unpleasant garments, her long

black hair touzled and uncombed, and her superb sibylline face innocent of soap and water if loaded with yesterday's powder and paint; nor would she rub the one with the white of egg which did service with her for the ordinary method of ablution, smooth the other into braids and stiff-gummed curls finished off by the high comb, square knot of crimson ribbon and black lace mantilla of her country, nor exchange her rags for a decent gown, till far into the afternoon. She still neither paid visits nor received them if not in the humor, and she seldom was in the humor; and in spite of all that Mrs. Harrowby could say, when ladies went to call on her and she was cross or lazy—and she was always cross or lazy, and sometimes both—would still shout out in her broken English and strident voice, "I will not see them, send them away!" though she was lying like a beautiful chrysalis in her hammock slung to a cut-leaved hornbeam in the garden, smoking cigarettes and making a hideous noise with her "zambomba," that queer bastard kind of drum which she had constructed for herself, after the manner of her country, out of a bit of bladder and an inverted flowerpot. No power on earth could prevent her from breaking her engagements if so minded, nor induce her to offer regret or excuse after; and on those rare occasions when they had guests at the Cottage she had no more scruple in leaving them immediately after dinner if she was sleepy and wanted to go to bed than she had in saying, "You do lie" or "You are stupid as a pig" when she desired to express a difference of opinion. For she had but one virtue, she used to say with her insolent laugh, and that was truth. It was not truth, however, for the love of truth; only truth for the scorn of others and indifference to what they felt.

Mrs. Fairbairn preached fresh air and Cash's rough towels as remedial agents when she complained of headache and dullness. Save on a few of the hottest hours of the hottest summer days, Pepita shut herself up in the drawing-room, doors and windows carefully closed, buried in an easy-chair before a huge fire, passing half the day in sleep: the other half she played at dolls with her little daughter Leam. She would not walk, and she was a coward and afraid of driving. She declared the English women were mad with all their soapings and brushings and furious exertions, and declined to follow bad example and destroy her peach-like skin before its time; so she stayed at home, rubbed her face with white of egg before whitening it with pearl-powder and reddening it with rouge; eat sugar and onion, "gazpache" and sweetmeats; grew enormously stout, but still kept her beauty of feature; slept sixteen hours out of the twenty-four; and on the remaining eight, when not eating, rubbed a stick on her "zambomba" or played at dolls with her little daughter, for whose special benefit she had dressed one like the devil, and taught her to call it *El señor papa*. In short, she was the savage of North Aston, and people never knew from one day to another of what mad atrocity she might not have been guilty over night. So far she had her uses, in that she kept the place alive and afforded ceaseless occasion for talk and speculation.

As for Mrs. Birkett, true to her central principle of non-intervention, she left the savage alone and did not lend a hand in the attempted work of salvation. She thought her a most unpleasant person, and said so—one whom she greatly feared and as greatly disliked. But she also thought that Mr. Dundas was very much to blame in marrying such a creature. It was a slight to the ladies of the place, and she was not quite sure that it ought to have been condoned from the beginning. Nevertheless, her private feeling did not influence her public manner; and although she said some hard things in confidence to her friends, she was always amiable to Mrs. Dundas in person—keeping out of her way as much as possible, and when in it smiling much and saying little; by which means she escaped the fate of those more energetic gentlewomen whom, because they wished to reform her, Pepita abused in Span-

ish safely, and called by names the equivalents of which would have been considered strong even at Billingsgate.

But if Mr. Dundas was to be blamed, he was also to be pitied. He had married this woman, picked up in a small wayside "venta" in the wilds of Andalusia, for that mad kind of love which possesses men like a malady—that love which makes them throw off the restraints of self-respect and common sense for the sake of tying a millstone round their necks which will one day drown them in the deep waters. He never gave an on-look to the years when passion should mean nothing and mental harmony all; when the beautiful mistress, fresh and young, should have become the wife of daily habit whose black eyes would have ceased to fascinate, and whose sole power of attraction would be in her mind and temper. He was in love, and saw the "ventero's" handsome daughter with the veiled eyes of romance and the belief in the all-sufficiency of beauty characteristic of that fatal artistic temperament by which men are ruined. When he was couched of his blindness it was too late. Nevertheless, he had still a kind of angry love for her, and resented that she was not all he had believed her to be, as much for the loss of his ideal as for the discomfort in which he lived through her heathenish modes of life. But the fact of his love still existing as an undercurrent did not make his peevishness more endurable to her, nor help to soften the savage hatred she felt for England and the English; for she, on her side, had had eyes veiled by romance and couched by knowledge. To her the tall fair handsome Englishman, whose color went and came in his face like a girl's when she looked at him —who, Sebastian too himself by name, was so strangely like that picture of Saint Sebastian in the little chapel on the rock where she used to go and tell her beads she sometimes half dreamed it was the Blessed One himself incarnate, and who loved her with such strength and tenderness combined — was a plaything too novel to lose. When she came to recognize his non-saintship, and to acknowledge his very natural humanity, she took up the other golden thread of his being. He was a grand hidalgo when at home, far superior to the brigands and muleteers who were his rivals, whom yet she regretted too. But though she liked her swarthy compatriots better in a way than she liked her fair-haired English caballero, yet he bid highest for her, and dangled before her eyes the most tempting lures. He would take her to El Corte, and show her the marvels of the great world. She was too ignorant to include Paris and London: it was only El Corte of which she dreamed as the heaven which this Englishman's gold could open for her.

When she married her fair-faced hidalgo, and came down to a dull, damp English village, where the sun never shone for more than two days in the year; where the fruit was sour and scanty; where there were no country fairs, no festas, no bull-fights; where they knew nothing of village dancing, never heard of the merry snapping "palillos" even as castanets—the wretched heathens!—and where they never went for the family washing to the stream; where there were no bells to the horses, no flowers, no color, no priests and no saints,—then she saw the mistake she had made, and revenged herself on the man who had occasioned it. She had never loved her husband as men count love. She had been overcome by his insistence, and dazzled by the dreams she had woven for herself. When the dreams faded and the reality came, her true nature showed itself, and she let the poor fellow understand clearly enough how things were with her. It nearly broke his heart. But she was a Spaniard who loved bull-fights; and if Dundas, as she called him, looked like Saint Sebastian, she thought he might as well complete the character and be well fitted with arrows.

Hence the life these ill-matched dreamers made together was of the least edifying kind. Her only solace was in Leam, whom she loved as a tigress loves her cub—his, in ceaseless lamentation and the universal demand for sympathy

natural to an affectionate and weak-willed man. As a rule, the women at North Aston gave him the sympathy he sought, but the men, after the manner of men, thought him but a poor creature at the best, and said among themselves that Pepita certainly was superb. And every man believed in his heart that *he* could have managed her if she had been his wife, but with such a fusionless creature as Dundas it was no wonder things went badly.

If the women generally took his part, especially did the Misses Harrowby, who had known Sebastian Dundas in his bachelor days, when they had all been girls and boys together, and he had been suspected of casting friendly glances that way. Things might have been different if he had never gone on his travels through Europe, they used to think, never taken a craze to visit the Alhambra, old Seville and Andalusia; and it would have been better for him had they been different. It would be hard to say which of the three—Maria, Fanny or Josephine—most lamented the untoward course of fate, most sympathized with his misfortunes, or regarded his wife with the greatest bitterness as the ruin of a dear good fellow who would have been such a charming man had he found the right kind of woman.

Perhaps, as time went on, the elder two dropped a little behind. They began to take life as they found it made for them—to be content with small things and to leave off looking for large ones. But Josephine was softer and younger. She had a habit of sighing; she and Sebastian often played at chess; and she did not find the Hill, fine old place as it was, so perfect as not to like sometimes to leave it for a castle of her own building and a seneschal of her own imagining—tall, fair-haired, fond of sympathy and as generous to submission as he was pliant to caresses. Had any one told her she was in love with Mr. Dundas, a married man, she would have denied it indignantly, and she would have been broken-hearted for shame and remorse had she proved the truth for herself. But men and women have the trick of self-deception undesigned; and things plain as an Egyptian pyramid to the world outside are hidden away, like jewels in a mine, from the soul harboring them in unconsciousness, but with tenacity—as in this matter of Josephine's blameless, unconfessed, but indisputable affection for Pepita's husband.

CHAPTER III.

MADAME LA MARQUISE DE MONTFORT.

THE rector and Mrs. Birkett were just finishing dinner. The month was April, time of day seven. Adelaide was spending the evening at the Hill; for though she was only twenty, and Josephine, the youngest Miss Harrowby, was, as we know, thirty at the least, the rector's daughter had chosen the three sisters as her chief friends, and had especially selected Josephine as her confidante and quasi-sister.

She admired the old Hall; the estate was large and well managed; Edgar, though in India at this moment, must come home some day; and Edgar was a handsome, love-making kind of gallant, who two or three years ago had been fond of rowing Adelaide on the Broad, as they called a widened reach of river that did duty for the North Aston sailing-ground; and Adelaide had not only a determined will, but a clear perception of those things whereon it was wisest to fix it, and the means whereby it was the likeliest to be attained.

Presently, while the rector was draining his last drop of generous port, and Mrs. Birkett was choosing for him the best-looking nuts and the fattest raisins, the servant came quickly into the room. "If you please, sir, will you step down to Aaron's?" he said, speaking very fast. "There's come a lady and a child, and the child's badly and can't go no farther; and Aaron he don't know what to do with them; so he has sent up Jane to say what's comed upon them, and to ask, sir, as if you'll please step down and be kind enough to see as what can be done?"

"A lady and child ill?" answered the

rector dubiously and with an accent of annoyance. "*I* am not the person to send for, John. Why does not Aaron go for Dr. Corfield?"

"If you please, sir, Aaron says he would rather you stepped down, as the child's so bad it's like to die, and maybe wants naming."

"Did he tell you anything about this lady?—for it is a most extraordinary proceeding on Aaron's part," said the rector crossly.

Consecrated to the care of lambs in the abstract, it did not please him to derange himself for an unknown sheep wandering from strange folds, and perchance one of a shabby flock fed on poor pastures.

"Aaron says she is quite the lady, and as handsome as ever you see, with a mort of luggage, and the child fit to die," repeated the man.

"Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Birkett sympathetically. The good soul gave a backward look to the time when her own cradle was full of sweet anxieties, and felt for the mother in her extremity. "I think, papa, you ought to go perhaps," she added with a certain hesitancy, being of that wise order of wives which lets the husband alone and does not seek to herd him like a dumb beast, sure to go wrong if not directed right. "There is no hurry. Finish your wine, dear; but the poor thing may want you, and then you would be sorry not to have gone."

"Well, I think I will go," said the rector a little briskly. The mention of the unknown lady's beauty and the mort of luggage had enlightened his mind as to the direction of his duties. "As you say, mamma, the unhappy creature may be in want of help; and if she is really a lady she must indeed want help without mistake. To have a sick child to nurse at Aaron's does not sound very promising."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Birkett, her kind face full of pity.

"Very well, John, tell them I will be down directly," said Mr. Birkett with his military manner; and John, giving back the regulation "Yes, sir," disappeared.

Then said Mr. Birkett, speaking from the door, being one of those all-or-nothing men who if they are asked for a hair give the whole head, "I say, mamma, if I find that the child is really too ill to go on, and there is nothing infectious, don't you think I had better bring her up here to sleep? That is, you know, if she is really a lady?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Mrs. Birkett with a curious mixture of timidity and earnestness. "As far as I am concerned, yes, most certainly; but there is Adelaide. However, use your own discretion, and ask Pace."

"I wish you were a little more the mistress of your own establishment, my dear," said the rector in an aggrieved tone as he went into the hall and summoned Pace; which was just what he did not like to do.

Though he always had been and always would be master in his own estimate of things, he never cared to try conclusions with Pace, who ruled the whole house—himself and Adelaide, who ruled all else, included—and that with a rod by no means wrapped in cotton wool, and considerably heavier than if made of flowers. She was one of those grim females who tyrannize in tears and suppress by pretending to renounce. If anything went wrong, and she was appealed to as the one who ought to know why, she would break out into angry weeping and protestations of how she slaved night and day for the family; and how she hoped they might find some one who would do better by them than she had done; and how she found it hard, after living with them so long and doing all for them that she had, to be told at the last that they did not trust her and were not satisfied; with more to the same purpose. By which it came about that, as she was really the most useful member of the household, if also the most unpleasant, Mrs. Birkett had to ask her to stay as a personal kindness; and each fracas ended by the chains being riveted more closely than before, and the mistresshood of Pace more solidly confirmed.

By good luck this important personage

happened to be in an amiable frame of mind this evening. Her mistress had presented her in the morning with an apricot-colored silk gown, much stained if little worn, and quite unsuitable to a woman of her age and condition. But it would dye, thought thrifty Pace, who, having already saved much, was intent on adding to her store, therefore always received her perquisites intelligently, and never allowed herself to be baffled by stains or unsuitability.

Hence, when Mr. Birkett asked meekly as to spirit if masterful in form, "Pace, if the lady at the Wellington is obliged to remain over the night on account of her child, and the child has no infectious disorder, can you put her up?" Pace answered with a shade less surliness than usual, "If you wish it, sir, I must, though I don't see how it can be done at this time of night, and nothing ready."

And the man who ruled the parish with no uncertain hand was grateful for so much concession from his housekeeper. Even Achilles had his vulnerable spot, and Mr. Birkett was afraid of his wife's old nurse and general factotum.

It was just as well that he should be afraid of something—just as well that he was only a pumpkin after all, very fine and showy on the outside, masterful and dictatorial to his inferiors, but with a core no stronger than pith. Had he been as solid as he was magnificent, as real as he was arbitrary, he would have been a frightful infliction to his little world. As it was, he was malleable under well-planted blows, and Pace, for one, knew where to plant them. Nothing of this, however, appeared on the surface, and as he walked quickly down the hill to the help of the stranger sojourning at the Wellington, he looked every inch the local king and masculine dominator of all about.

A hired carriage stood before the beer-shop door. The rector's quick eye at once discovered that the luggage piled on the top and slung behind was of superior quality and sufficient quantity. So far, things looked satisfactory, and he lowered his well-brushed head as he passed into the dingy passage with a comfortable conviction that the person he had gone to visit would prove in truth a lady, and that he was on the verge of a pleasant yet safe adventure. Asking in a loud voice for "the strange lady I have been desired to see," he was taken into the sanded parlor smelling of stale tobacco and permanent spillings of beer, and stood face to face with the new-comer.

She was a handsome woman of about thirty, to judge by the generous lines of her fine figure, but she might have been only twenty, taking her features, skin and coloring at the first glance—her brilliantly fair complexion, her lustrous golden hair, her small white teeth, the brightness of her well-shaped hazel eyes, and the rounded contour of her soft smooth cheek. She was dressed in deep mourning, with a widow's cap under her bonnet, and looked subdued and quiet, but noticeably self-possessed. The child on her lap was about six months old. Here was a woman evidently used to good society, thought the rector, as she bowed when he entered, raising her bright eyes steadily to his, and apologizing in a low, sweet, level voice for not rising, on the plea of not disturbing her child.

"Pray do not disturb yourself," said Mr. Birkett with his best air, fatherly for the priestly part of him, gallant for the soldierly. "I am afraid the little child is very ill," he continued, drawing a chair near to her and examining the infant lying in a death-like torpor in her arms.

"Yes, she is," said the lady sadly. "This dreadful sleep came on about an hour ago, just as I was passing the head of your valley on my way to Sherrington. Had my nurse been with me, I should have thought she had given her opium, and I should not have been so much alarmed then, knowing the cause. But I have had the child to myself all the day, and know that it is not that; and I cannot tell what to think." She raised the little hand to her lips. "My sweet one!" she said tenderly, bending over it gracefully.

"I think you had better send for Dr.

Corfield," said the rector, more and more interested. "It is a long way to Sherrington, and the diseases of children are rapid. At all events, you cannot be wrong in sending for him."

"Yes," the lady answered. "Is Dr. Corfield skillful?"

"He is all we have in this remote place," said Mr. Birkett; "and though he does not practice much now, he is ready enough in resource, and knows his profession."

"Thank you!" then said the lady, lifting up her winsome face, to which gratitude gave a flush infinitely becoming. "I thought you would advise me to something. Clergymen are always so wise and helpful. Will you, then, be kind enough to tell them to send for the doctor? I did not know that one was to be found in so small a place."

Her voice and manner, though perfectly feminine and even grateful, had just that fine air and accent of a woman who is accustomed to command—a "mistress" woman, used to homage and accepting it as her right—which so much pleases some men. It pleased the rector, and confirmed his faith in the newcomer's quality; and when he told "Aaron's Jane," as Mrs. Walsh was called by the neighbors, "to send off at once to Dr. Corfield, and beg him with his compliments to come over to the Wellington without delay," he spoke with the peremptory insistence he would have used had the unknown been one of the royal princesses and the comatose child the future hope of England. Then he ordered candles to be brought, and himself arranged them to the greatest convenience of his companion; and he thought she looked more beautiful under their pale shine than even under the parting glory of the golden sunset.

In a short time Dr. Corfield came, abstracted, dreamy, full of his latest experiments in toxicology; but he knew what he was about, though he scarcely looked like it, and caught certain indications of hair-tint and complexion in the stranger which had escaped even the lynx eyes of the rector. After making his examination of the child in silence, during which time the lady had in her turn watched him narrowly, he peered mildly over his spectacles and said simply, "Opium."

"So I too would have thought had I not had the child with me all the day," said the lady, as she had said before. "No, it is not opium; and it is that which has alarmed me so much."

Dr. Corfield looked puzzled. "Not likely to be teething coma," he muttered as if to himself, rubbing his chin.

"Never mind the name: what can I do for her? What ought I to do?" asked the lady, going straight to the point, as the rector remarked with approbation.

"A fine business-like woman," he said to himself. "So truly feminine and ladylike, but with no nonsense about her." He was in the mood to find all she said and did in good taste. She had fascinated him.

Dr. Corfield smiled. "But the name regulates the treatment," he said in his quiet, dreamy way.

"Meanwhile, my child dies," returned the lady with natural pathos, and just a touch of indignation.

Dr. Corfield considered—the rector, saying, "Come, Corfield, come!" as if he was speaking to a slow boy in his class.

"A warm bath, cold applications to the head, and I'll send you some medicine to be given at once," he then said.

"Thank you," said the lady, with less gratitude than she had shown to Mr. Birkett.

"How far are you going to-night?" asked the doctor.

Lifting her eyes and looking at him quietly, the lady answered, "Surely, I am not going on at all. I shall halt here, of course. How could I travel with the child in this state?"

"But you cannot sleep here," interposed Mr. Birkett.

She looked round the squalid little room with a patient smile.

"I did not see what kind of place I was in," she said. "No, truly, I cannot sleep here, but I can sit up and watch."

"You must come to the rectory," said

Mr. Birkett warmly. "We are homely people"—there was not a luxury missing in the establishment, not a square inch of the whole house that was not perfect in its upholstery—"but you will find comforts there for your little one you cannot find here. This is a mere village beershop, in no wise fitted for you."

She bent over her baby. Then raising a face calm as to feature, but as pale as the child's in her arms, she answered quietly, "Thank you very much. I cannot refuse your kindness for my child's sake. I am ashamed of giving you so much trouble, an entire stranger as I am, but the mother's need must plead for me."

She spoke sweetly, calmly and with dignity, but her low voice a little faltered, and she was evidently much moved. Truly, a most gracious lady, one who knew how to mingle the nobleness of self-respect with the tenderness of womanhood, and to accept a favor as if conferring a grace.

"You need no pleader," said the rector. "We are delighted, Mrs. Birkett and I, to be of this service to you."

"Shall I send the medicine to the rectory?" asked Dr. Corfield, singularly for him the most practical at this moment of the three.

"Yes," answered the rector; and the lady, bending her head, murmured again, "Thanks."

"As I am to be your guest, you will probably wish to know my name," then said the lady rising and looking at the rector. "I am Madame de Montfort. I may say," she added with a slight smile, as one passing by a silly toy—and her renunciation only made her more beautiful—"I am Madame la Marquise de Montfort, as my dear husband was Monsieur le Marquis. But I do not care to take my rank in England, where I am not known, more especially now that he has gone." She sighed, and her red lips quivered. "But that is my real name," smiling sadly again, and conquering her emotion with a visible effort.

"It is a good name," said the rector, who felt that he ought to say something, and scarcely knew what.

"A fine old name," put in Dr. Corfield. "Simon de Montfort was a great man."

"We belong to the same family," said madame with decision.

"Ay?" said the doctor: "your pedigree would be interesting to trace."

"My dear baby's recovery is the most interesting subject to me at this moment," replied madame, as, shifting the child with a certain dainty air of inexperience in her manner, she looked at the rector as if waiting his permission to leave.

"True, true," said Mr. Birkett hurriedly. "I beg you a thousand pardons for this delay."

She bent her head again with her sweet and royal kind of smile, then passed from the room like a queen, and in a few moments the horses stopped before the porch of the pretty house where Mr. and Mrs. Birkett and their daughter Adelaide found their home.

"Now," said the rector gallantly, "I trust you have come to the end of your troubles."

"Can it be otherwise under the sanctuary of the Church?" answered the lady. "The instant I saw you, dear sir, I felt comforted and safe."

"What a charming woman!" thought the rector. "What an exceedingly lucky thing that I thought of bringing her here! Quite refreshing to meet with such a creature in this dull hole!"

And as he thought these last words he ushered the widow of Monsieur le Marquis de Montfort into the drawing-room where sat his kindly, placid, tender-hearted wife.

CHAPTER IV.

WORTH DOING.

A BABY was the only thing that could rouse Mrs. Birkett from her normal condition of even-tempered indolence. She was intensely maternal for infants, if not a satisfactory educator of older children, and could have passed her whole life in a nursery with a succession of embryonic heroes and heroines to kiss and dandle.

For any baby in long clothes she was a true spiritual Althæa, and found nothing a trouble if transacted within the nursery; but for a sick baby she was as the mother of the gods to be had by the day for love, with an almost extra-natural prescience of its wants and needs so soon as she had it in her comfortable arms and in her broad maternal lap.

She had a kind of magnetic power, too, that was very striking. She could soothe a crying child when no one else was able to quiet it, and her medical skill about the cradle was like another sense. The one sorrow of her married life was that she had not had a large family, and the woman she most envied was Mrs. Fairbairn of the Limes. A child every eighteen months—a baby always on hand. Could there be a greater joy on earth? a happier lot for woman? When she thought this she inclined to find her quiver with its one solitary shaft but very meagrely furnished; and Adelaide, instead of gaining interest by concentration, seemed to lose for want of sharers.

This arrival, then, of a lady with a sick child was as much a godsend to the rector's wife as to the rector himself, and she received Madame de Montfort with all her faculties aroused and all her sympathies alert, prepared to accept anything the mother might be for the sake of the child.

But when she saw the beautiful face and form of the stranger, heard her singularly sweet voice, noted her ease of manner and well-bred self-possession, and looked into her fine eyes, she was as much captivated with her personality as her husband had been, and showed her belief with the simplest good faith. She received her as her friend, and took her sorrows as her own. Madame was almost bewildered by the warmth of her new hostess, and wished she had been slightly less demonstrative. She embarrassed her and made it difficult, as she said to herself.

Mrs. Birkett took the baby into her own arms, and looked at it as Dr. Corfield had done, with more tenderness if less technical perspicacity, but narrowly enough to make the mother still more uncomfortable, and to render that vague "difficulty" yet more embarrassing.

"I know exactly what should be done with it, madame," then said Mrs. Birkett after a pause. "My own child had just such an attack as this when she was a little thing, and I thought I should have lost her, but I knew what to do, and so saved her; and she never had another."

At which madame, looking straight into her face, answered with a grateful air of retrospective sympathy: "How distressing! and how strange! I am indeed fortunate in finding such a clever adviser."

"Oh, I hope we shall soon get the poor little darling right," said kindly Mrs. Birkett, her maternal breast aglow.

And madame, with a graceful slight inclination of her head, echoed "I hope so" in a manner that gave her hostess the credit of the cure should it be effected.

Then Mrs. Birkett, still carrying the baby, herself took the stranger to her room, herself saw the bath prepared and carefully tested with a thermometer, arranged the chairs, stirred the fire, and caused to be brought in three times as many things as were wanted, much to the annoyance of Pace, who disliked the rooms to be what she called "upset," and who resented as a personal injury any departure from the fixed rules of life and ordering she had established in the house.

It was a marvelous outburst of energy in one who was content generally to take life in an easy-chair and "on casters," neither fretting her mind nor disturbing her body for any event that might or might not happen. But the rector thought it not unnatural on the whole, seeing what kind of person Madame la Marquise de Montfort was, and how far superior to the ordinary run of women. The child did not count for much in his calculations.

In due time the medicine arrived, the little creature was put into the bath, and madame, at her own request, was left for the night. She preferred the lonely vigils of her anxious love, she said prettily, to being enlivened by companionship or relieved by substitutes; and Mrs.

Birkett, though reluctant, was forced to respect her wishes. Had she had her own way she would have sat up with the baby herself. There would have been no fear of her falling asleep, unless it had got better and was asleep too—naturally, not in this death-like state. Then indeed she might; and what a blessed sleep, once more with a little one pressed to her bosom and encircled in her arms!

But she could not force herself on her guest, and was fain to withdraw tearfully. And when the stranger was perfectly sure that the hospitable instincts of her host and hostess were all fulfilled, she locked the door, gave the baby something that made it open its eyes and moan feebly, but that seemed to do it good; and as she leaned over it said with unaffected compassion, but no extra sentiment, speaking indeed more as a kind-hearted spectator might have spoken than as a mother, "Poor little thing! I am sorry for you; but it was worth doing, baby."

On which she placed it comfortably on the pillow, and then sat down to reflect, a smile on her comely face and a look of success in her sparkling eyes.

"The stars in their courses are fighting for me," she said, her face flooded with triumphant joy as she turned it toward the firelight. Drawing a deep breath, she added, "Things are almost too easy. I must be careful not to rely too much on my good luck, and not to relax."

At this time she had not seen Adelaide.

If Madame la Marquise de Montfort was charming over night, when subdued and depressed because of her baby, she was doubly so this morning, when, her little daughter being better, she had her mind more to herself and could talk with less preoccupation. And she talked well, in spite of one or two odd slips in grammar that made her hearers stare at their incongruity with her manner and appearance, not to speak of her station. But as she had lived a great part of her life abroad, so she said, these slips might charitably pass as the natural consequence of her foreign education, and not provoke unfriendly comment.

She knew, too, many people of note—in itself a recommendation—and she mentioned them in an incidental way, carelessly and by chance, without effort or apparent boast. They came too much as a matter of course for boasting, but she evidently, said the rector, knew a great many celebrities, and her acquaintance with titles was as extensive. And how beautiful she was! Sitting there in the morning light, her deep crape weeds made in such perfection of fit and taste, and the most becoming little trifle of a widow's cap set on the top of her golden tresses, the rector thought he had never seen a lovelier creature of the kind; and even Mrs. Birkett felt yet more tenderly to the child for the admiration she was by no means backward in bestowing on the mother. But Adelaide watched and weighed, and doubted if she was even pretty. She had to know her better, she said to herself, before she could allow her to be good-looking: at present she only watched.

Talking still in the level, smooth manner that was habitual to her, madame touched on her personal history. Her husband was only just dead, she said, her fine hazel eyes becoming moist, but no tears actually overflowing. She was of a nature too self-restrained to weep like a school-girl before strangers, and show her bleeding wounds without reticence or delicacy. And in a kind of sick despair—for what had life now to offer her?—she went on to say, speaking very calmly, but therefore only the more pathetically, she had determined to leave the world and all its hollow joys, and find some place in the country where she might devote herself to her child, and try to be, if not happy—she should never be *that* again—at the least useful to others, and for herself resigned. She had heard of Sherrington, she said, as a pretty, quiet village—it was a bleak, upland market-town, without picturesque beauty or local advantage of any kind—and she thought that she might be able to live there economically; for, with a grand and gracious frankness that sat so well on her, she confessed that she was not too rich since her dear husband's death.

His property, which was very extensive, had gone to his brother as the next heir, her child, being a girl, not inheriting.

At which the rector stared, but supposed she knew what she was talking about, and that the French law of inheritance might be one thing for commoners and another for the nobility. Or perhaps he had been misinformed as to that family division of lands he had been taught to consider universal; at any rate, he was not disposed to doubt the truth of the whole for the sake of this one enigma as yet unexplained, but sure to be easily solved if only he had the key. This slip, however, was not lost on Adelaide; and Adelaide had less than her father's faith.

Therefore, madame continued, finding the country the best place for herself and her child, she had sold off everything, and left London, where she and her dear husband had been residing for the last year, parting with her carriages and horses, her men-servants and her women-servants, of course. She could not ask them to share a fortune so changed as hers. But with a sweet motherliness of soul shining through her discourse that charmed Mrs. Birkett she somewhat wondered that her nurse refused to accompany her. And yet, sighing, what right had she to expect any one to sacrifice her life to her, a stranger? Only, turning to the rector's wife listening so sympathetically, she thought that if she had had a child from the birth, as nurse had had her darling, she could not have left her.

To which Mrs. Birkett responded by a warm negative, and, kind-hearted as she was, a vehement ejaculation of "Wretch!" flung like a red-hot missile after the faithless and self-seeking *bonne*.

Journeying from Bar Aston Station to Sherrington, she went on to say, just as she passed the head of the North Aston valley her child sank back in her arms in the alarming kind of fit they had seen. In terror and despair she told the driver to turn from the main road and follow the way to the village. She could do nothing else, such a complete stranger as she was, knowing neither the place nor its surroundings. Thus it was that she had come to North Aston; and the result they knew as well as she did.

"Surely," she concluded, looking at Mr. and Mrs. Birkett effusively, "some spirit led me by the hand."

"If so, then it was our good genius," said Mr. Birkett gallantly.

"I am sure it was mine," responded Madame de Montfort.

"By which it would appear that we have the same," said the rector; and madame smiled and bent her head, saying, "How fortunate for me!"

"Then," said Mrs. Birkett, who seemed to have been revolving something in her mind, and to whom the servant at her own desire had just delivered the baby, "if there was a house here fit for you, how far better it would be to remain among us, instead of going to that hideous Sherrington! It is the dullest and most uninteresting place you can imagine. Why go there?"

Madame de Montfort looked calm and tractable. "I have no special ties there," she answered. "I remember a friend of my dear husband's telling him one day about it, and praising it. It was by the merest chance I remembered this in my day of need; but I do not care where I go."

"You might as well live in a pretty place as in an ugly one," said Mrs. Birkett, who was herself much influenced by scenery.

"Surely," answered madame: "that is only common sense. But," she slightly sighed, "it makes no real difference to me where I am if the air agrees with my darling, and I can live in peace and do good."

"I wish we had a place for you here," said Mrs. Birkett again, and looked at her husband.

Madame, her face quiet and statuesque as usual, her eyes bright too as usual, bent toward her child and tenderly tapped its little face.

"But you have not?" she asked, her breath slightly incommoded by her attitude. "Then it must be Sherrington."

Mr. Birkett reflected. "There is no place anywhere," he answered, "except

Lionnet. "Would that do, mamma, for Madame de Montfort?"

"It is very small, certainly," mused Mrs. Birkett, while madame looked from each to each with the air of foregone acquiescence in their judgment—an acquiescence that was not weakness—there was nothing weak about her—but that conveyed in the most subtle and delightful way the sense of her own ignorance, her moral weariness for the loss of her husband, and her gratitude to them for taking so much care of her and giving themselves so much trouble for her.

"Oh, mamma, Lionnet for a lady!" cried Adelaide, with condemnatory emphasis.

This was the first time she had spoken. Hitherto she had contented herself with looking and listening, forming her own opinion of the stranger's loosely-hung if smoothly-narrated story. Now she spoke, hoping to demolish the theory of the Lion Hut as a suitable residence for this newcomer with the fine air and the grand name. Adelaide Birkett, with her pale flaxen tresses and cold blue eyes, was not so much fascinated by this splendid creature with the warm gold, close-waved hair, and hazel eyes so full of life and fire, as were her father and mother. She kept her twenty-years'-old intellect more in hand than they, and criticised more keenly because she doubted more coldly.

The rector, who had seen as much of the odd side of life as a respectable clergyman well can, and more perhaps than he ought, might have picked a few holes in the thin places of his guest's history had he been so minded, but he was resolute to turn only the best side outermost, and he left the thin places untouched, by design. Adelaide, on the contrary, searched for them with vicious diligence, and when she found them she held by them and made them larger.

Had she been asked, she could have given no intelligible reason why she had taken this strong antipathy to madame. She was not given to strong emotions of any kind as a rule, and she prided herself on her indifference to most people. But all she knew was that, in spite of the sweet smile and that perfect tranquillity of good breeding which so charmed her parents, she disliked and distrusted this handsome immigrant from Heaven knows where, this sorrowful widow of M. le Marquis de Montfort, this anxious mother of an ailing infant, this plausible artist in the mosaic-work of well-fitting story, wherein, all the same, well fitting as it was, were gaps; and that she disliked and distrusted her as she had never disliked or distrusted any one before—not even Pepita, the wife of Sebastian Dundas, with whom she had waged for years an unceasing war.

"It *is* small, as Adelaide says," returned the rector in a tone of apology, "but it is available, and a little taste and judicious expenditure can do wonders with it."

"At all events, you can look at it," Mrs. Birkett suggested. "It is only a few minutes' drive from here—not a quarter of an hour's walk even for me, and I am not a good walker."

"That would be very nice for me," said madame smiling: "I could see so much of you then, and not under fatigue. And I have always been a dutiful daughter of the Church."

"Ah?" returned the rector, with that curious pride of the ecclesiastic who takes to himself all the compliments paid to the faith or the Establishment.

"Yes, my father was a clergyman," said madame.

"Indeed! Where?" asked the rector briskly, suggestive of looking up the name in the *Clergy List*.

"In America," answered madame demurely.

"Have you been in America?" said Mrs. Birkett with surprise. "You have no accent."

"I was born there," answered madame, "and I lived there till I came to Europe to be educated."

And as she said the word "Europe" she gave it the American intonation, which settled the matter.

Only Adelaide said, a little spitefully, "The daughter of an American clergyman married to a French nobleman living in London! What an extraordinary mixture!"

"Yes: is it not?" returned madame with equanimity.

But she caught the accent all the same, and scored it in her mental notebook.

After some pleasant feminine play between Mrs. Birkett and madame respecting the care of the infant in the mother's absence—the one desiring to keep it, the other afraid of giving trouble—it was at last agreed that madame should go off now at once with Mr. Birkett to see Lionnet, poor Miss Snelling's little house, which the rector and his wife so much desired she should find suitable for her home. Truly the stars were fighting for her in their courses, as she said. Things were indeed almost too easy.

With a strange superstitious feeling, and vaguely remembering the way of witches whereof she had heard—how the Lady Geraldine bore herself when she came to the castle of Sir Leoline, as had once been read to her by one she then loved—madame sprained her ankle just as they reached the threshold, and the rector lifted her over in his arms.

"I consider this equivalent to your giving me possession," she said prettily, looking into his face as she made a few halting steps through the little hall and shook off her sprain at the drawing-room door.

The upshot of the survey was that Madame de Montfort agreed to take the cottage if Mr. Dundas, whose property it was, would accept her as a tenant; to which Mr. Birkett set his shoulders square and said, "Accept you as a tenant! I should like to see him refuse."

She did not agree to take the place precipitately, only by degrees yielding her objections to confined space, low ceilings, want of spare bedrooms for friends, and the like; but ultimately yielding in favor of the advantages accruing from a low rent, light taxes, lovely view, healthy situation, the glimpse of Dunaston Castle to the east, the fine outline of the rocks bounding the gorge, and vague "availability"—whatever that might mean. She did not give the rector the idea of a person seizing eagerly at a thing, and therefore a person without a background or an anchorage—a bit of social driftweed as poor in friends as in circumstances; which has a bad appearance, and gives room for suspicion and disrespect; but she consented to apply for Lionnet only after due reflection and with a certain dignity and self-sacrifice very remarkable—her child always her first consideration, and her own wishes set to the side and subordinated to this. In the end, however, she consented, and returned to the rectory the future tenant of Lionnet should Mr. Dundas, to whom the rector wrote, agree to accept her on her own representations and Mr. Birkett's security, offered without hesitation.

Mr. Dundas was not slow in responding. The rector's note took him by surprise, for he had not yet heard of the arrival which had set tongues in North Aston wagging as nothing had moved them in this generation since Mrs. Dundas had first shown herself in a high comb and mantilla. Not quite understanding what it all meant, he rode off to the rectory with speed, and was introduced as madame was discussing her plans with Mr. and Mrs. Birkett, hearing where she could get servants, who would best suit her for a gardener, how she could set herself up in this and that—flowers, vegetables, poultry, a cow, a carriage, a cart, pigs and horses being among the items named.

"Madame de Montfort, let me introduce to you your future landlord," said the rector, presenting Mr. Dundas.

Madame looked up, smiled sweetly, bowed gracefully. "I hope we shall come to terms, sir," she said in a charming, half-foreign way.

"We have already," answered Mr. Dundas, to whose wildest dreams such a heavenly tenant as this had never presented itself.

More talk followed on this relating to rent, lease, conditions and the like; in all of which Mr. Dundas was utterly unbusiness-like and entirely satisfactory. She might take the whole thing on her own terms: it really was a matter of so little importance to him he did not care what she did or paid, provided she made herself happy and comfortable in the place. He would give her an agreement

wherein he would bind himself not to disturb her, but give her the power of quitting at any moment she might like. In fact, he was a perfect Jupiter of a landlord, and she would honor him if she would but consent to be his residential Danaë, and accept the golden shower he was only too willing to outpour.

To all of which she gave a graceful and yet very dignified adhesion, dwelling much on his rights, but finally accepting his proposals, and ending the discussion as the tenant of Lionnet, holding possession by her own will only, and bound to pay the most moderate amount of rent Mr. Dundas could ask without showing her too plainly that he wished to make it easy for her. "As I am a stranger, and can give you no local references of any kind," then said madame with a heightened color, "perhaps it will be more satisfactory to both sides if I pay a quarter's rent in advance."

She put her hand into her pocket and pulled out her purse.

"By no means—certainly not," said Mr. Dundas, pressing back her hand. "I shall consider myself affronted if you attempt such a thing."

She smiled. "As you like," she answered. "If you like to trust me, I have nothing to say against it. I only thought you might wish to be on the safe side."

"I am that as it is," said Mr. Dundas.

To which she answered simply, "Yes, I know that you are, but you do not."

The sound of wheels came up to the door: voices were heard in the hall. Adelaide, starting up, went forward with a certain exaggerated tumultuousness of affection and familiarity, to show that she was bored here and had no part in what was going on; and the rector, looking at his wife, said, "The Harrowby girls, my dear."

The door opened and two ladies entered. At this moment Madame de Montfort slightly started and shivered, but her placid face showed no signs of emotion, though it was even paler than usual when she lifted it at the introduction.

"Madame de Montfort, allow me to present to you Miss Harrowby and Miss Josephine Harrowby," said the rector as if on parade.

And madame, half rising, smiled and bowed as gracefully as usual, her eyes, with the pupils dilated, glancing at the girls sharply, and her skin still congealed from that shivering start she had experienced. But people often shiver, especially after a journey, so there was nothing very wonderful in that. Even Adelaide, on the lookout for unfavorable indications of all kinds, was forced to acknowledge the entire unreasonableness of attempting to find any meaning in such an automatic action. Besides, what kind of relation could this stranger have with her friends the Harrowbys?

For all that, she did give a slight start and shiver when they were announced, and she was paler than her wont, and her eyes were keener and larger and darker when she looked at them. How white she was, and how bright the flash of her eyes when Josephine Harrowby, sitting near her, admired the baby and crooned over it!

"Are you fond of babies?" asked madame, quietly as to manner, but still pale and intense in face.

"Passionately," said Josephine with a yearning look.

Madame rose and laid the child in her arms: "You look like a mourning Madonna in your gray mantle and with your brown hair," she said. "Quite a picture."

Josephine blushed.

"There, Josephine! There's a compliment for you," said the rector, laughing.

Josephine laughed too, the better to hide her embarrassment, for madame and the rector together had drawn all eyes on her, and Mr. Dundas looked with the rest.

For want of a safer retreat she bent her flushed face over the child and kissed it; then asked, "What is its name?" earnestly, as if the answer was really of importance.

"Fina," said madame; "or rather"—correcting herself—"Josephine."

"How odd!" cried Josephine, blush-

"'BY NO MEANS—CERTAINLY NOT.'"

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ing yet more deeply, "Why, that is my name!"

"Is it?" said madame, arching her eyebrows. "What an extraordinary coincidence! My dear husband would have called the whole thing a dedication—the picture, the name, the likeness. His name," she added with a slight compression of her lips, "was Joseph."

PART II.

CHAPTER V.
AT THE HILL.

A SMALL country society like that of North Aston receives with unbounded hospitality or rejects with unconquerable suspicion a new-comer of proper appearance not fully accredited. Either the tedium of life carries it over ordinary caution, and people are glad to welcome any break in the monotony under which minds are rusting and hearts are withering, or the desire to remain safe in the narrow fastnesses of the known is stronger than the yearning for enlarged experience, which may have its dangers. Hence strangers without vouchers are assimilated greedily or repudiated crudely; and the one process is oftentimes as disastrous in the end as the other.

Fortunately for the present success of Madame de Montfort's plans, whatever they might be, North Aston, led by the rector, made up its mind as a community to receive her on her own credentials and his sponsorship; to suspect nothing of what might lie concealed, and to give full value to all the charms and graces that were evident.

Mrs. Harrowby, on hearing the report of the day's "find" from her daughters, did certainly look doubtful, saying with emphasis, "I am sorry for it: we have had enough of foreigners here;" meaning Mrs. Dundas and her heathenisms, which time neither softened nor destroyed.

Still, taken by the hand as madame was by both Mr. and Mrs. Birkett, Mrs. Harrowby's vague dissatisfaction went for nothing, even though she was Mrs. Harrowby of the Hill; and madame found her order of admittance easy to obtain, and her path to the small North Astonian penetralia made marvelously smooth.

Then she gained no small amount of social glory, if also some amount of blame, by the mode in which she trimmed and arranged her little place. She made it the prettiest, daintiest doll's house to be found in the whole country, and fulfilled the rector's generalized suggestion of availability with a perfectness which he himself never expected. And he was of those who hoped all things from madame, and believed no less than he hoped.

Here she built up a rustic verandah, there threw out a picturesque conservatory; flowers and flowering bushes were planted by the cartload, till the whole place was like a picture for color and a flower-farm for perfume. The rooms were decorated in patterns, tints and methods quite out of the ordinary North Astonian beat, and therefore much canvassed. These decorations, indeed, made almost a schism in the place, one side liking the drawing-room paper of flat blue-green, with the high dado of that indeterminate hue which goes by the name of peacock-blue, and the other side calling it ugly and eccentric. But madame got the greater number of votes in her favor on the whole; for the gentlemen were with her to a man, and made the ladies understand that their want of admiration was the result of prejudice and narrow brains and a sign of their mental inferiority generally. The ladies, on their side, admitted the good taste of the muslin curtains, lined with delicately-tinted tarlatane and looped up with broad bows of ribbons to match, which she had hung wherever they could be hung, and the worked muslin squares for antimacassars, pinned on to the chairs with sash ribbons, were also generally approved of as improvements. These were matters more within their natural range, and whereon the gentlemen allowed them to have their own opinions undisturbed; though here again Mrs. Harrowby shot her little shafts of dissent, for the home target only, and said disdainfully after their first state visit, when

Josephine was enthusiastic and she wished to restrain her excessive eulogy, "Yes, pretty enough in a way, but too much like a milliner's shop to please me. Indeed, Madame de Montfort is too much like a milliner all through for my taste."

And Mrs. Corfield, looking round on this billowy expanse of muslin, put in briskly, as her demurrer of good counsel: "I should take these curtains and things down for every day if I were you, madame, and put them up, if you must at all, only for grand occasions. They will cost you a fortune in washing else, and that stupid Mary Warren will tear them to rags before you know where you are."

Letting these little notes of dissidence pass, when the whole thing was complete no one could deny that it was a success, or say that Lionnet was other than "the most perfect little gem of its kind," as the rector used to declare a dozen times a day with the air of a man who has created something for which the world owes him gratitude, and who has the right, therefore, to be always holding out his hand for payment. And as it was a success, even with the blue-green walls and the green-blue dado, its clever mistress gained a certain flavor of renown, amounting almost to a moral virtue, from the fact that her house was picturesquely arranged and her rooms quaintly furnished, and that she had given the other housekeepers of North Aston a few new ideas in the way of assorting colors and hanging breadths of muslin.

Madame la Marquise had been at North Aston about six weeks now, of which the last two had been passed in her own house. All the ladies save Mrs. Dundas had called on her. They had waited until Lionnet was reported to be finished and she ready to receive, and had then left their cards as the official act of registration demanded by the proprieties. She had seen and been introduced to each in turn at the rectory, but there she had been only a guest, holding a reflected, not an individual, position, the rector bearing the sole burden of responsibility. Now each family took its share in the plunge, and for good or ill she was accepted as one of themselves.

The second stage in the little conventional process of initiation to be gone through would be her own return visits; the third, the set dinners that would be given in her honor when her mourning should be sufficiently mitigated to allow her to enter into state amusements; the fourth, her own acknowledgment in kind. Afterward she would be exactly niched and tabulated according to her deserving, and drop from a phenomenon into a circumstance. Some of the ladies thought it was time she should so drop. They were tired of hearing Madame la Marquise de Montfort so continually discussed and praised.

The first place to which madame went on her round in her "landlord's" carriage was the Hill. Oddly enough, she was nervous about this visit. She always had been nervous with the Harrowbys, and especially with Mrs. Harrowby. When that lady had called at the rectory while she was there, she had turned even paler than when the young ladies were announced; and when she praised the baby, which Mrs. Birkett was nursing as a matter of course, the usually placid marquise had trembled like a schoolgirl on her examination-day as, gracefully taking the child, she laid it in Mrs. Harrowby's arms, and heard her say as if to herself musingly, "What a pretty little thing! Of whom does it remind me, I wonder? I cannot think."

On which, recovering herself — for trembling was not much in madame's way — she had said with her pleasant smile, "She ought to remind you of one of your own children, for she has the same name, Josephine."

Nothing since then had occurred to destroy the odd embarrassment always felt by madame in the presence of Mrs. Harrowby, as nothing had occurred to soften the vague distrust which Mrs. Harrowby felt for madame; and the visit of registration had been paid and was now to be returned, things remaining in the same condition of armed neutrality as before, Mrs. Harrowby knowing that madame wanted to conciliate her, and

madame knowing in her turn that Mrs. Harrowby distrusted her and would not be conciliated.

The Hill was a large old-fashioned country-house approached by a magnificent double avenue of horse-chestnuts, and surrounded by a stately garden laid out in the formal terraces and parterres of Queen Anne's time. Within, it had a great deal of heavy furniture, mostly ugly, set in inconvenient places, and a general expression of dinginess and wealth consequent on generations of possession and an inherited quality of family conservatism. It would have been against the Harrowby traditions to have remodeled or modernized anything belonging to them; and the result was by no means lively.

At the present moment there was an unmistakable look of dullness about the place, the inevitable result of the death of the head. The old chief had gone and the young one was absent, and the sole representatives of power were the widowed mother and maiden sisters, who had none. Things went on as they had always gone on from the motive-force belonging to the accumulated habits of years, but there was no spring, no life, no growth in the place, and everything was at a kind of rusty standstill, wherein nothing moved but the rust, and that increased.

So it would be till Edgar should return and put himself at the head of affairs. Why he had joined his regiment instead of selling out and coming home, as the only proper place for him on his father's death, no one ever knew. It had offended his mother gravely at the time, and she had told him her mind, as was her wont. But though her son had been respectful enough in his reply, he had kept to his plans and offered no reason that carried conviction with it. There was evidently some mystery connected with this sudden and inconvenient resolve of his; and even if Mrs. Harrowby had wished to penetrate it, she would not have been able: it was like hewing at a stone wall with a straw to try conclusions with Edgar when his mind was made up, and those only who could read small print through the traditional milestone could see into his motives or his actions if he wished them hidden.

The consequences of his absence, however, were the beginning of all sorts of small frays and fractures in the well-ordered fabric of the Hill property, and a general look of moribund grandeur about the old place, dingy, dignified, substantial, but evidently needing manipulation with new brooms.

It was the greatest possible contrast to madame's airy fairy little palace of light and color, her doll's house of picturesque arrangements and ingenious makeshifts. Size apart, her miniature Lionnet was far more charming to her than this dingy old Hill, and more in consonance with her tastes and habits. Nevertheless, her heart leapt within her, her cheeks flamed suddenly and as suddenly the color faded, her eyes sparkled with a bright metallic lustre that made them harder and more inscrutable than ever, as, looking up to the gray old mansion standing in the sunlight at the end of the blossoming avenue—that avenue which was the pride of the country and the show-place for miles round—she said something to herself in a low voice, whereof the nurse sitting opposite with the child heard only one word above the crunching gravel: "Mine!"

Mrs. Harrowby was at home, and Madame la Marquise de Montfort was ushered through the lofty hall, the walls of which were decorated with buffaloes' heads and royal antlers, brushes, New Zealand and North American Indian weapons, rare birds that had fallen to the master's gun in foreign parts, and models of monstrous fish that had come upon his hook—in short, the usual trophies and ornaments of a country gentleman's hall; through the long, closely-carpeted passage set thick with quaint curiosities; through the ante-room made dangerous by obtrusive piles of fine old china, and into the inner drawing-room where the ladies sat.

She was by no means flushed or sparkling now. Indeed, she was so deadly white that Mrs. Harrowby's first movement was one of compassion, fearing she

was about to faint; but her smooth voice and perfect self-possession of bearing reassured the lady, so that she greeted her, as she would have greeted any other stranger, with good breeding, but coldly. Josephine was the only one who gave her hand a frank press or looked into her face with anything like friendly interest in her own.

Josephine had "taken to" her; and what can you do against a girl's fascination with only such a broken weapon as a vague surmise of evil and a baseless dislike, you cannot tell why? Mrs. Harrowby was annoyed that her youngest daughter had found madame so fascinating, but she was powerless to change her for the present, and she only hoped no ill would come of it.

After the welcoming greetings were over, they all sat down and began to discuss that aspect of Shakespeare and the musical glasses which was proper to the occasion. And the first thing which madame did was to praise the avenue. She thought that if there was safe ground anywhere, here at least she should be free of pitfalls.

Mrs. Harrowby, though immensely proud of this avenue, did not somehow care for Madame de Montfort's praises. "It is nothing so very wonderful," she said coldly. "It is not better than Bushey Park."

"It seems odd to me that any mere private house can bear such a comparison—can be ranked, indeed, anywhere near a royal palace," said madame sweetly.

"Evidently you have not seen many of our great houses," returned Mrs. Harrowby disagreeably.

"Are there many with double avenues of horse-chestnut?" asked madame with graceful simplicity.

Mrs. Harrowby looked much annoyed. "Have you seen Chatsworth?" she asked, retreating in good order.

"Yes," answered madame. "It is very fine, the park and gardens—everything on a magnificent scale. Still," reflectively, "I don't remember any double avenue of horse-chestnuts."

"I should have scarcely thought you so literal, madame," said Mrs. Harrowby with a dry cough.

"No? Nor am I to every one; but there are certain people whom one takes literally: people who speak fast and heedlessly one passes by, but the literal talkers seem to require the same kind of hearers."

Madame said this very nicely, making it a compliment by implication so far as manner went; but Mrs. Harrowby moved uneasily on her seat. She felt the sarcasm through the flattering manner, and all the more as it was delivered in a form she could not resent.

Some family portraits were hanging round the room. Madame's quick eyes had noted the fact as she came in, but she had not looked at them more attentively after that one hurried glance of entrance. They were of all kinds. Here was an ancestor in a cannon-curled wig and long flowered waistcoat; here the ancestress corresponding in high-rolled powdered hair, peaked stomacher and hoops; there was the late Mr. Harrowby when a young man, with a curl on his forehead and in the high-collared blue coat and tight nankeens of the period; and in the companion panel hung Mrs. Harrowby when a young woman, her head turned over her bare shoulder to the left, with ringlets parted on one side, gigot sleeves, and shoes with sandals plainly shown beneath her short and narrow gown. Over the piano were to be seen the three Misses Harrowby, done in chalks, when little girls; over the door was the picture of two boys in Highland costume, Edgar and Frank. There they were again—Edgar in his cadet's uniform, Frank in his college cap and gown; and here, again, Edgar in his full captain's regimentals as he looked just before he sailed for India, and Frank as a young gentleman of fashion for the rising generation to laugh at in their turn, as Frank himself had often laughed at his father's high collar and nankeen tights. Both were considered good likenesses.

So said Mrs. Harrowby when, seeing madame looking at the portraits of herself and husband, she profited by the occasion to withdraw altogether from

that unlucky discussion on chestnut avenues, and threw the conversational ball to another quarter. "Have you seen those, madame—my sons Edgar and Francis?" she asked. "They are admirably done, and admirable likenesses."

Madame gave a perceptible movement: it was not a start nor a shiver; it looked like that thing people call a thrill. For a second she looked down, and her breath seemed to come by an effort. Then, raising her eyes with a certain fixedness that did not seem quite natural, she turned them full on the pictures indicated, and said quietly, "They look good portraits;" adding with her smooth flattering air, "and sons to be proud of, I should think."

"Oh," cried out Josephine impulsively, "you would say that if you knew Edgar."

"They both seem nice," said madame with a sudden flush and an inexplicable confusion in her face—so visibly and so much confused that Mrs. Harrowby looked at her keenly, a flush of terror in her own.

Then said Madame la Marquise de Montfort, her lips quivering and genuine tears in her eyes, "You must think me very foolish, dear Mrs. Harrowby—" Mrs. Harrowby winced at the familiar endearment of the epithet—"but the portrait of your eldest son has reminded me so powerfully of my poor husband, I cannot pretend not to feel it, and I cannot conceal my emotion. It was just his air—just his look."

The dainty handkerchief went up to her eyes, and she suppressed a little sob that was not affected.

"Which do you think my eldest?" asked Mrs. Harrowby, still with that look of vague terror in her face, but now with a certain stern watchfulness superadded.

"You have told me yourself," answered madame tremulously: "your son Edgar."

"Yet it is not a French face at all," said the mother. "It is a purely English face and a purely English character."

"My dear husband had English blood in him," said madame more composedly. "He was indeed more like an Englishman than a Frenchman, and I often used to tell him so. You see no trace of what we mean by the French physiognomy in my little Fina?"

"No, no, none; certainly not—most strangely not," said Mrs. Harrowby with almost cruel emphasis.

"No," replied madame, "there is none to see."

After this the conversation drifted on to other topics; and in due time madame took her graceful leave and went farther on her round.

"How could I be such an idiot?" was her voiceless self-reproach as she drove down the avenue. "I thought I had nerved myself too well for this. But I got out of it cleverly, and I do not think she suspected me. Perhaps, indeed, I made a good stroke—a fluke if I did. I must be more cautious for the future, however, and not let myself be caught so foolishly again. Thank Heaven, the worst is over now till he comes back!"

On her side, Mrs. Harrowby, in reply to Josephine's enthusiastic "Now, mamma, is she not charming?" gave, as her deliberate conviction, this dictum: "My dear girl, what Madame de Montfort really is I do not know, nor who M. de Montfort was; but of this I feel sure: there is something very odd about her, and something that I do not like at all. I say nothing against her character, because I know nothing; but if I had had my way, we should have had a detective down from London and have learnt all about her before we accepted her. I hinted as much to Mr. Birkett, but I think she has bewitched him like some others," with a displeased look at Josephine. "At all events, I don't like her; and though I am obliged to visit her, as every one else does, I do not trust her, and I wish she had never come into the place. That is all I have to say."

"Mamma, you are not just," remonstrated Josephine with a burning face. "I have never known you so uncharitable before."

"Hush, Josephine!" said Fanny in a reproving voice: "you should not speak so."

"Josephine, how can you be so impertinent to mamma?" echoed Maria; while Mrs. Harrowby said, illogically but an-

grily, "If this is the consequence of your sudden friendship for Madame de Montfort, how can you expect that I should like her, Josephine? I am ashamed of you! taking part in this manner with a stranger against your own mother!"

CHAPTER VI.

FOR AND AGAINST.

IT was the fashion in North Aston to praise Madame de Montfort in public, though in private there were more dissentients than confessed themselves openly. Mr. and Mrs. Birkett, however, were genuine in their admiration, and the warmest of her friends. She had fascinated the rector—all in honor and sobriety of feeling be it understood, in nowise trenching on his loyalty to his wife or giving her cause for uneasiness. Still, it was fascination, and he did not deny it. But Adelaide held aloof, and "declined to discuss madame" when the past and real personality of that enigmatic lady came on the carpet, as it always did whenever two or three were in conclave together. And her reticence had an ugly look and caused remarks. But her parents had censured her so severely in the beginning when she had questioned the entire satisfactoriness of their new favorite that she had taken the lesson to heart, and now sat silent and disdainful when madame was made the central point of social interest. She was disdainful indeed about the whole affair, and wondered where her father's perspicacity and her mother's instincts had gone. She never for a moment faltered in her own belief that madame was an adventuress, and she accepted her title as she would have accepted the account of a materialized spirit. But as all this was less from true perception than from the jealousy of sex and exclusiveness of condition characteristic of her, her manifest dislike had not much influence in the place, and people only said among themselves, "How wretchedly Miss Birkett gets on at home!" and, "What bad taste it is in Adelaide to show the world how much she dislikes Madame de Montfort, when her father and mother have taken her up so warmly!"

For the rest, the Fairbairns had received the new-comer with the facile acceptance of good-natured indifference. They did not become intimate with her, because they were not intimate with any one—so large a family as theirs was independent of outsiders—but they were always smiling and friendly to madame when they met, and suspected nothing, because they did not give themselves the trouble to think or compare.

Of the Harrowbys, as we know, Mrs. Harrowby distrusted her, but was too cautious to say so in public. She contented herself with home objurgations, which relieved her mind and did not commit her to an embarrassing course. The elder two daughters were half charmed and half repelled—the former in madame's society, the latter in her absence when they dissected and considered her—but Josephine was honestly in love with her, and cared for nothing so much as to be with her, worshiping her as simple-minded, loving-hearted girls do worship older women better versed than themselves in the grammar of fascination.

The Corfields were tepid. The doctor laughed in his sleeve at her dyed hair and well-arranged face, marvelously well done, but he did not betray her even to his wife. It was no business of his, he thought: why should he be the one to make her eat dirt? And as she was an amenable kind of person in speech, and took all Mrs. Corfield's recommendations amicably, with promises of obedience, that good fussy soul for her own part was naturally more prepossessed in her favor than not, and Alick thought her more like a Zenobia than she was.

But no one had gone down before her in such unquestioning worship as Mr. Dundas, her landlord, though no one hated her so much or said it so openly as Pepita, whose ill word counted for the enemy. Hitherto the standing feud of the place had been between Pepita and Adelaide, as indeed how should it not between such discordant elements? A violent and undisciplined savage, without principles, reticence or the sense of

social decorum, there must needs be enmity between her and a conventional English lady whose pulses never quickened with emotion, whose thoughts and affections—passions she had none—were under the strictest discipline of the coldest reason, to whom the alpha and omega of morality were the conventional proprieties of English middle-class life, and who despised all that was not English save Parisian millinery and Italian art. Pepita had hated Adelaide because of her coldness, her English ladyhood and her English prejudices; and Adelaide had hated Pepita because of her fury, her Spanish habits and her Spanish prejudices. Now they buried their own long-used hatchet in the grave of a joint animosity to madame, and even drew together in some show of alliance that they might the better smite her.

They met with their match in Madame de Montfort, who knew the art of saying disagreeable things in a pleasant manner, and the value of showing the power of fight when needed, though her governing policy was one of conciliation. With all Adelaide Birkett's self-control, she had more intelligence and more experience; and with less raw material of beauty than Mrs. Dundas, she had a better style and greater charm. Hence she carried society with her when she came to close quarters with her enemies, and always contrived to turn their guns against themselves.

And then she was fresh, and the North Astonians had got accustomed to each other and palled with Pepita. The Spaniard was gorgeous and magnificent truly, but she was always the same; and when you had once seen her dressed for the evening, with her high comb, her falling lace mantilla half concealing the knot of crimson ribbon in her gummed hair that became her so well, her handsome face—handsome still if disfigured by its coarse paint—looking out from the softening folds like the face of a many-fleshed and much-bedaubed Melpomene, you had seen her always. She never varied—was never more than a grand bit of waxwork for her quieter days, or a very vulgar Mænad for the more disturbed, when the blood was in her brain to excess, and her temper suffered in consequence. But Madame de Montfort, if also in a certain sense always the same for sweetness and placidity, was in another always new. If her tact and gentleness never varied, her conversation did, having ever some fresh sparkle of anecdote or description, some enlivening talk that made her the most delightful companion possible. She knew so many famous people, and so much about them, that she was real food to the hungry minds of North Aston, bound by circumstance to social famine. And she did not rush out all her knowledge at a breath, but kept it in reserve judiciously, detailing only in detached bits those circumstances of varied travel or celebrated companionship which she thought would interest and amuse. It was really quite an education to talk to madame; and if sometimes she made slips and confounded her friend Stonewall Jackson with her next-to-father Abraham Lincoln, or gave Bismarck's policy—told her in confidence—to Bunsen's private confessions, who could blame her? Memory is proverbially treacherous, and why not hers with others? She was pleasant—that was the primary fact to be dealt with: the secondary was, that she laid herself out to charm the women quite as well as the men, which was amiable, seeing that the men so openly adored her, and that the women admired her only by exceptions. Hitherto, the gentlemen had devoted themselves to Mrs. Dundas on those occasions when she appeared among them, partly because she was handsome, and partly because their wives were afraid of her; but now Madame la Marquise reigned the local queen, and the Andalusian was deposed. Juno, splendid, but stupid and a termagant, was nowhere when Venus, gracious, soft and subtle, took the reins in her hand and drove her chariot to the winning post; which did not tend to make Juno more pleasant to her rival.

Then madame broke the dull uniformity of North Astonianism so delightfully. She gave charming and informal *réunions* which kept every one alive—so charming and informal as not to seem

out of place with her fresh crape and her widow's cap, and to which even Mrs. Harrowby, also in her weeds, went with the rest. This too counted in her favor, for she substituted elegance for expense, and so did not come into competition with the older inhabitants, who had placed their faith in profusion. Her age, as she allowed it, was twenty-three, and in some lights she looked less, if in others considerably more. This was natural, as she must have begun life early to carry all her experiences fitly. She sometimes made her hearers look at each other when her stories were fuller than usual of chronological marvel, but she generally contrived to clamp her anecdote with some unanswerable fact and to soften down its more startling lines, so that she sailed out of the strait with flying colors and left her audience only the wrack of an abortive suspicion.

"She certainly does tell the most extraordinary stories of places and people that she has seen and known," Mrs. Harrowby used to say to her daughters. "One wonders who she can be herself, to have met with all these great people. We cannot say she tells untruths, because we know nothing about her one way or the other; still, I for one do not believe her, and I do not wish you, my dears, to be too intimate with her or to rely too much on her veracity. Girls like you cannot be too particular."

In spite of which warning, Josephine —good-natured and affectionate Josephine, her brother Edgar's favorite and never weary of talking of him — was often at Lionnet. Madame had subjugated her as she had subjugated the rector and her landlord. The dedication of the baby had touched her yearning heart; and was not Sebastian Dundas, the object of her innocent devotion, daily at Lionnet, in his quality of landlord ministering to the needs of a valued tenant?

A man of misleading imagination and irritable nerves, whose fancy ran on excitement and whose temper demanded quiet, Mr. Dundas was one of those men whose life is always at odds with their desires. What satisfies the one part starves the other, and that which is starved is always that which is most imperative and most important. Before he married he had lost his soul in reveries on "burning orbs" and "beautiful tigresses;" after he married he thought that the dullest and most prosaic hen-wife, whose poetry translated itself in pickles and preserves, and whose heroism was the heroism of a patient, plodding, domestic drudge, would have been infinitely more his ideal than this superb creature of fire and torment, beauty and disgust. Glorious eyes and peach-like skin, the supple grace of a leopard and the exciting nature of a tigress, fantastic dress and unusual ornament, are all very well in the early days and before familiarity has led to satiety. In time, meals served with punctuality and composed of food fit for a Christian gentleman's digestion, days passed in peace, and the handy articles of furniture lying about not converted into missiles sent flying at your head, nights given to sleep and free from raving hysterics and small white teeth gnawing at your arms like a wild beast at a bone, language purged of epithets of more force than delicacy,—in time all these are more to the purpose of rational life than love at high pressure and admiration at white heat. And so Mr. Dundas found to his cost when his dream of Spanish romance faded and he woke to the pitiless daylight of a wrecked and wretched English home. But for the not very elevated feeling that he should leave Pepita triumphant and be her victim to the end, he would probably have put a bullet through his head years ago. Had he had a drop of Southern blood in him, he would have put one through hers.

The suavity and repose of Madame de Montfort acted, then, like balm, like sleep, on his irritable nerves. He seemed to grow young again in her society, to be re-cast into something like his old self before domestic suffering had made him peevish and selfish. She drew him magnetically, and calmed him into a state that looked almost like patience, and that was not far from forbearance; of which Pepita had the benefit, as the wives

of men made happy out of the home not infrequently find. All time seemed to be lost that was not passed with madame, and as her landlord he took care that the greater part of it should be passed with her.

Though the rector, who regarded madame as his spiritual ewe-lamb, did not like Sebastian's frequent presence at Lionnet, he had no stable ground for remonstrance. Madame, tranquil and unruffled, was so superior to vulgar suspicion, to self-condemnatory fear, it would be ungentlemanlike to even hint at caution or displeasure; and the rector prided himself on his gentlehood quite as much as on his sound theology—perhaps more. Besides, how can you insinuate precautions against doubtful behavior to a widow with her weeds still fresh and the name of her dear husband for ever on her lips? It was an insult he could not offer her, even though he never paid a pastoral visit to Lionnet, which was pretty nearly every day, without finding Mr. Dundas installed there before him or seeing him arrive almost immediately after. Sebastian had, however, always good reasons for coming: now it was to assist madame to plan out a new flower-bed, and now to mount her water-colors, which she said were done, some by herself and some by her husband.

By the bye, their work was marvelously alike, and there was an odd confusion of signatures; for if V. de M. stood in one corner, something else was sure to be discernible underneath, and the J. de M., which represented Joseph de Montfort, the late marquis, was written in madame's handwriting, as perhaps was natural. No one but Mr. Dundas saw this, but he kept his counsel so loyally that even she never knew he had discovered the little discrepancy.

Nevertheless, though there was, as we have seen, always a good reason for his being there, and though madame never showed the slightest embarrassment when he came, but received him in the most natural manner in the world, and made it appear how his coming was to be accounted for, Mr. Birkett wished that he could give her a hint or that Sebastian had more consideration. Madame de Montfort was but a young woman yet, for all her *savoir faire*, and it would be a thousand pities if, in the innocence of her heart, she laid herself open to ill-natured gossip. Besides, Mrs. Dundas was such a dreadful creature. There was no knowing what fearful scandal might not arise if she took it into her head to be jealous and to make a scene. It quite fretted the rector. Was she not his charge? and were not he and Mrs. Birkett specially responsible for her? To be sure, Josephine Harrowby was often at Lionnet, but somehow this carried no comfort to Mr. Birkett. On the contrary, the idea of "those two women hanging about Dundas," or sometimes "that conceited fellow of a Dundas making a fool of himself with those two women," when he had left him master of the situation, as he was occasionally obliged to do, was intensely distasteful to him. But he kept his counsel, as Mr. Dundas had kept his, and not even to the wife of his bosom expressed his opinion that Madame la Marquise de Montfort allowed Sebastian to visit her too often, and that mischief would come of it if she was not careful.

Thus three gentlemen of the place silently agreed to suppress facts which might have aroused suspicion if told, and so far made themselves the unconfessed tools of the clever comedian now playing her part among them. It was one of the things which men do for women when, if crafty, they are also clever—the women who, while they deceive, take care to amuse—while they use are solicitous to flatter. The honest, who neither deceive nor flatter, seldom come off so well.

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

MRS. DUNDAS had not yet called personally on madame. More than once her husband had left her card, accompanied by some well-sounding word of apology, which madame had taken in good part and as if she believed it, though she knew quite well that after the first each successive card had been

surreptitiously abstracted from Pepita's filigree silver case, and that the apology was a coinage of Mr. Dundas's own brain. She had been very gracious and amiable about it all, and had waived the ordinary ceremonial in the Spaniard's favor—going to call on her first—with that frank sinking of small things which is the prerogative of the superior person. But after this introductory visit, when Pepita had felt constrained somehow to behave with unwonted decency, madame had not shown herself at Andalusia Cottage again. It was too much like venturing into the den of a wild beast to be an agreeable pastime; and though she had come out safe from the initial encounter, she did not care to try conclusions a second time.

So here, too, things stood in that state of armed neutrality which means secret war, Madame la Marquise knowing that Mrs. Dundas suspected her of abstract evil to any extent, and not disinclined to supply her with concrete reasons in one direction, and Mrs. Dundas knowing that madame disliked her, and having no desire that it should be otherwise.

One day, however, Mrs. Dundas, taking no counsel with her husband, set out to Lionnet, carrying Leam with her. Leam was now about fourteen, a tall, slender, brown girl, with a quantity of dark hair—not jet-black like her mother's, but with some of the father's gold on the edges when the sun shone across it, framing her sad face and drawn as a coronet above her melancholy brow; with large pathetic eyes, and a fixed, sad mouth that neither smiled nor quivered, but that was always set to one expression of tragic immobility. It was a face promising exquisite melodies of thought and feeling, eloquent of capacity for suffering and intensity of love, but as yet the reality fulfilled nothing of the promise. Those large, long-fringed, mournful eyes were like glorious gates leading to an empty chamber. The soul that seemed to look through them was only the shadow, the potentiality, not the thing itself. Sorrow she never knew, because she never knew joy; thought was a thing as yet unborn in her unawakened brain; she saw without understanding, lived without learning, and the beginning and end of her capacity for love was her mother. But here her love was intense—so intense that it touched on the borders of heroism and was in itself a poem. Life had no other object for her, the universe held no other centre, than that beloved mother; those flowers only were beautiful which her mother praised, those beings only sacred which her mother cherished; she cared for no glory in the starry sky, no loveliness on the green earth, no thought of the soul of man, no knowledge, no desire which her mother passed by and disdained; no sage could have instructed her, no angel could have guided her, had her mother derided the learning of the one, the wisdom of the other; and when she thought of God, she thought only of her mother as a man. The passion of race, too, bound her with a tie even stricter than natural instinct; and nothing angered Leam so much as to call her English and like her father, as nothing brightened her to such near resemblance to pleasure as to say she was her mother's miniature and a Spaniard of the true blood.

Living between two parents who were confessed enemies, she had chosen her side, and this with no half-heartedness, no halting of the will. She loved the one partly with the blindness of instinct, partly with the pride of likeness, in some degree with the sense of dependence, in some with the sense of mutual isolation, and with a certain compelling sentiment of fear dominating all. But it was a fear that only drew her closer; for if the mother's violence was extreme, so was her love; if she struck, she caressed; and children pass by the violence as a mere adjunct if they get the love as the substance. This was how she felt for the one: for the other she had the disdainful kind of hatred it was but natural she should feel, accustomed as she had been from her earliest infancy to play with a flaxen-wigged doll dressed in scarlet and black, with horns, hoofs and a tail, and called "El señor papa." How should she not hate him? He was her mother's oppressor, had light

hair and blue eyes, was a Protestant and an Englishman: how, then, should she, a Spaniard and her mother's daughter, love him? The thing was out of nature, and Leam did not try to compass the impossible.

Densely ignorant of all that it would have been good for her to know, Leam had learnt only two things to perfection —to keep silence and her own counsel. Silent and cautious as one living in an enemy's camp and with a sacred cause to defend, she was at the same time destitute of conscience and without a fragment of moral sense other than might be contained in her passionate fidelity to her mother. The words right and wrong were words having no meaning for her; and she knew no barrier save material impossibility between herself and her desires.

If she had no morality, neither had she any religious or spiritual life. Her cardinal point of religion, as Pepita had taught it, was to despise the English Church as heretical, and to hold that its doctrines, whatever they were, had been first taught by the great arch-fiend himself. Her mother told her so; and of course if her mother said so it was true. She had an idea that English people believed in nothing—neither in God nor in the devil, neither in the saints nor in heaven. Her mother used always to say that Protestants were pigs, good only to be roasted by slow fires, and that she wished the Holy Inquisition was established once again, that these heretic dogs might be burnt with their sins. As for the priesthood of Mr. Birkett or of married clergy in general, Pepita best expressed her ideas thereon when she one day took the cat, tied round its neck a pair of paper bands, and a black rag made to do duty for the Geneva gown, then hung it up by the neck, crying, "Preach, Birkett, preach! The one is as good as the other." She hung the poor cat till it died; but Pepita was an Andalusian, with none of that false sentimentality which makes men pitiful to beasts. She only laughed as she kicked the still quivering body aside, and said savagely, "I wish it had been the man-dog instead. A priest with a wife! Pah! he should be burnt!"

She had thus destroyed all possible reverence in her little daughter for the faith of the world in which she lived, but she had substituted no other of any value. She had taught the child to say her Ave and Paternoster and to tell her beads, to cross herself, to believe in the Holy Mother more than in God, and in the saints before the Mother. But she had taught her to except Saint Sebastian, who had once been Pepita's patron saint and favorite, and to call him cheat and rogue loudly, so that he should hear. Had he not led her to her ruin by the living lie of his likeness? Pepita used to say. Her patron saint indeed! What was he about, to let Sebastian Dundas befool her as he had done? He was stupid, wicked, of no account, so he was deposed with contumely, and Leam was careful to vilify him daily as her mother's enemy. But if he had failed, there were others who were good—saints who would restore her lost toys, make the sun shine when she wanted it to be fine, and work small miracles in her favor when properly entreated; and to these Leam was used to pray when she wanted their help. All the same, she might rate them roundly if they neglected her.

This was the sum of the child's religious faith and practice. It was not much, taken in a vital sense; but how can ignorance give knowledge? It was fetichism of the grossest kind, but what else could Pepita formulate, fetich-worshiper as she was?

Here, then, we have her, Leam, as she was at fourteen—a mere bit of brute material, potential, not active; a soul unborn; heart untouched, save by one affection; a spirit imprisoned; an intellect unawakened; a vitalized machine made after the pattern of humanity, but as yet only a machine; an elemental chord whence would be evolved rich and lovely harmonies or strong and jarring discords —who could say which?—volcanic forces for the present battened down and with the surface smoothness unrent and undisturbed. For the rest, she was shy and taciturn, speaking English with a certain

hesitancy that rendered her yet more silent; not so strictly beautiful at this present time, for she was meagre and undeveloped, as promising to become so when more fully matured. And then she promised to develop a loveliness as superb as her mother's, and more refined, less animal and more thoughtful, less passionate and more intense.

Silent, impassive, ignorant, her heart closed against every one but her mother, and held by that mother in almost Oriental seclusion, no one in North Aston could be said to know Leam Dundas. She had never mingled with the other children, after the manner of country families living side by side; and on those rare occasions when Mr. Dundas, for contradiction, had insisted on her going to their games and fêtes, she had sat apart silent and motionless, refusing to join in their games, not laughing, not speaking, not moving—a dark-eyed, melancholy little statue, too proud to cry and too shy to thaw. The children all dreaded her, and she dreaded them. Hence there had never been any cordiality between her and them; and, as has been said, no one knew her, and she was never seen beyond the garden, and rarely within it.

Madame de Montfort had been two months at Lionnet and had not seen Leam until to-day. This bright and burning day of June, however, Pepita and Leam in their lace mantillas, with high combs and ribbon rosettes in their hair—blood-red for the one, blue and white, Our Lady's colors, for the other—and carrying fans as if they were at home in Andalusia, came like creatures out of a Spanish chorus at the opera and presented themselves suddenly at Lionnet, where they found Mr. Dundas, as his wife expected to find him.

Hot and cruel as one of her own sandy deserts, and jealous as the traditional Spaniard should be, Pepita had no idea of letting others take pleasure in her rejected property. She would have refused her castaway crusts to a starving woman if the fancy had so taken her, and she carried out the principle with her husband. She did not trouble herself much about the doings of the Misses Harrowby at the Hill, though here too she would sometimes descend like a tornado and scatter the harmless interests got up by the spinsters with their old friend, as a storm scatters the treasures of little shrines in undefended places. But for the most part she despised them too much to interfere with them; "white mice" she called them with the Spanish gesture of contempt when she baptized them as nothing worse. Neither was she jealous of the Limes' girls, pretty, curly-headed Carry Fairbairn and that roguish Susy, both of whom everybody liked, and who paid back their popularity in a general coinage of good-nature as heartsome as kissing, and the same to every one; and as to Adelaide Birkett, she knew her sentimental spouse too well to fear his making any ideal out of her straw-colored hair and china-blue eyes. But Madame la Marquise de Montfort was a woman of another kind: her influence was altogether different; and stupid as Pepita was in some things, she was clever enough to recognize here her mistress and her rival. For which cause she set out this sultry sunny day of June to pay her long-standing social debt, and to make madame over and above a free gift of some part of that doubtful thing she called her mind.

Madame was sitting in the drawing-room as Mrs. Dundas and Leam came in. She was trimming a baby's frock—a safe and sacred kind of employment which neutralized the cozy familiarity of her companionship. For Mr. Dundas was in the conservatory leading out from the drawing-room, pottering among the flowers as if he were at home. He was talking gayly to madame while she pinched up bows and he stuck in labels, his work to-day having been to write botanical names on white painted labels, and to distribute the same correctly. It gave a scientific air to her horticulture, which was what madame liked, and it suited her to appropriate another person's knowledge.

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Dundas," said madame, meeting her guest in her usual charming manner—graceful, sweet, friendly but not familiar, always with that

slight air of well-bred condescension which expresses the sense of superiority, but refuses to profit by it, characteristic of true nobility.

It was an awkward moment for Mr. Dundas, looking so much at home among the flower-pots. He had to pretend that he was not afraid of his wife, and to conceal that he was; also to prevent, if he could, the outbreak he felt sure would come. But if he was a little unequal to the occasion, and could scarcely rise to the height of his responsibilities, madame was strong enough for all exigencies, and without apparent strain.

Taking no heed of Pepita's furious face when she saw her husband where she expected to see him, madame, with the placid air, smooth voice and perfect self-possession which were her characteristics, began to talk to her guest about her garden, the flowers she had planted and the flowers she was going to plant, and how deeply indebted she was to Mr. Dundas for his timely visit to-day, when she had come to the end of her small store of knowledge and he had so kindly supplied her with some new names. "I am so passionately fond of flowers," she went on to say in that easy uninterrupted flow of talk which was like the run of a river, and almost as impossible to check when she had a purpose in going on. "I do what I can, you see, here, but at the best I have nothing like yours in your lovely country," with a smile that credited Mrs. Dundas with all the beauty of Spain—flowers, customs, costumes, all. "When I lived at the court of Aranjuez, in the service of Her Royal Majesty, we ladies had a parterre for ourselves, planted with the loveliest flowers in the world. You know the pomegranate, of course, señora, and the oleander? The parterre was full of pomegranates and oleanders, with oranges and myrtles, and lots of other things I don't remember. The queen used to walk with us there for hours in the cool of the evening."

Here she stopped, and with the look of one lost in retrospective thought pinned a bow on the baby's frock.

"Were you at our court?" asked Pepita almost solemnly, her big eyes fixed with an odd kind of reverence on this soft-voiced ubiquity.

"It was my second home," said madame gently.

And there was so much of truth in her romance in that she had begun life as a nursemaid to an English family living in Madrid, and had passed thence to a similar post in the family of a court lady at Aranjuez, where she had met her first fate.

"Then you are not a pig of a Protestant, but a good Catholic like me?" cried Pepita, ready to forgive and believe everything now.

"I never talk on religious subjects," said madame gravely: "there is no use in it, and it only makes bad blood."

"You lived at our court at Aranjuez?" repeated Pepita.

The very words seemed to soften the fibres of her angry heart. Madame, if not the rose, had been so near to it as to carry about her the sacred perfume. If not herself royal, she had consorted with royalty, and Spanish royalty—the only true thing, the only real blue blood of them all; none of your make-believes, like this wretched little court of England, buried among the Scottish mountains and consorting mainly with gillies and gamekeepers; but home royalty, the royalty of the only throne to be called a throne in the world.

Madame smiled, and then she sighed. "I met my husband there," she said: "he had Spanish blood in him."

"You had not told me that," said Mr. Dundas jealously. He hated Spaniards as much as Pepita hated the English, and he wished this charming creature had not been so far defiled.

"No," answered madame quite tranquilly: "I have not had an opportunity, I suppose. I do not often speak of myself in general society, and I never see you alone."

"Can you talk Spanish?" asked Pepita in *patois*.

Madame shook her head. "I have forgotten my Castilian," she said; and then went off into a vivid description of Andalusia, cleverly got up from Murray, in which she mentioned by chance—and

this was pure chance—the district where Pepita had lived.

It was the crowning stroke of fascination. "Did you see my father's house?" she cried.

Madame might keep that worthless Sebastian of hers to label her flowers and frame water-colors as long as she liked now, if only she would talk to her of Spain, and tell her about El Corte and the bull-fights, and her father's house too. Poor Pepita! she often lived back in the glad old turbulent days of her youth, and wondered what had become of big brown José, of swarthy Juan, of fierce Martin, of lithe young daring Pepe. How they all loved her! and she—ah! she would have been happier with any one of them, though only muleteers for their living and brigands on the off days, if it had not been for that false Saint Sebastian, who had sent a pretended hidalgo to bewilder her with his promises and draw her down to evil and misfortune at this accursed place.

Madame watched the splendid face in its softening dream. "I dare say I did see your father's house," she said. "I knew almost all the noblemen and gentlemen in the place. Which was your father's?"

Before Pepita could answer, Mr. Dundas said harshly in Spanish, "Hold your tongue, woman! Do you want all the world to know from what robber's hovel I took you to be an English gentleman's wife?"

On which Pepita turned round on him and presented him with that piece of her mind which she had spared Madame de Montfort, Leam sitting by.

Unfortunately for the child, this was no unusual experience, and she was neither surprised by, nor did she take part in, these animated parental dialogues. She only hated her father in her heart more and more for the harsh things which he said to her mother, while she thought that mother's passion to him the most natural and justifiable thing in the world.

Madame, feigning to believe that the dead-white face of the husband as he said a few words in a low, hissing voice in answer to the torrent poured out by the wife, shouting, gesticulating, aflame, meant nothing but the friendliest intercourse, said, turning to Leam, to whom she had not spoken before: "I suppose you understand Spanish, Miss Dundas? How I envy you! I am so sorry I have forgotten mine. I really think I must take it up again, and then I can join in the conversation."

Leam made no answer. She did not see that one was wanted, and she was constitutionally chary of her words. She simply raised her large eyes to madame and looked at her mournfully, as if some unutterable tragedy was connected with the fact of speaking Spanish like a native; and then she looked at her mother for assistance.

It was Mr. Dundas, however, who, turning that dead-white face of his from his wife to madame, answered for his daughter. "It is scarcely worth while to give yourself much trouble for that, madame," he said bitterly. "I do not think you would be greatly edified by joining in any conversation between Mrs. Dundas and myself."

"No?" she answered smoothly. "You must allow me to be the best judge of that."

The visit soon came to an end after this. As she rose to go Pepita said, in her broken English, "We must have a talk together, señora, you and I, when my husband there" (with a contemptuous jerk of her hand) "is making fools of those white mice Harrowbys. I must hear of my beautiful Spain. It will do me good. You are the only person I have seen since I came to this place of perdition who has been there. Pigs! they don't know the only place worth knowing. And you have seen our queen! Oh yes, we must speak together."

"Yes, we will talk of it," said Madame de Montfort quietly, her calm face and civil voice contrasting so strangely with the fierce excitement of Pepita. "I will gladly tell you all I can remember; and I hope I shall have the pleasure of welcoming you here again soon.—Thank Heaven, that is over!" she thought as Mrs. Dundas and her daughter left the

room, Pepita calling to her husband in Spanish, "Dog of an Englishman! you are not wanted, else I would drag you out with me by your beard of straw."—"I would as soon see a wild beast in my room as that awful woman. What a horror! what a monster! And that girl! A mere large-eyed idiot without two ideas in her head. She looked as if she was imbecile, and I believe she is. Pah!"

To Mr. Dundas aloud she said sweetly, "What a superb face la señora has, and la señorita too! And the exquisite beauty of their dress! What a mistake we English make in our fashions! How far more beautiful the Spanish costume!"

"I detest it," said Mr. Dundas sharply; and madame changed the conversation.

While going home Pepita was extraordinarily excited. She spoke in a loud, strident voice that made the laborers in the fields and the passing carters look at her curiously. They had never got quite used to her heathenish headgear, and thought her mad without a doubt. To-day they thought her madder than ever; and the haymakers and the weeders looked one to the other as "Madam Dundas," as they called her, drove by, and some said compassionately, "Mr. Dundas, hé be main holden with such a missis;" while others, sterner in their perception of retributive justice, answered back, "He be well served. What call had he to tie hisself up to a heathen like that there?"

"Leama," cried Pepita in Spanish—mother and daughter never talked together in any other language—"I hate that woman, but she masters me when I am with her. You must hate her too, little Leama, and not let her master you."

"I do if you do, mamma," answered Leam.

"But I was glad to hear of the old home," continued Pepita. "Ah! little one, when you are old enough to have money of your own, we will go to my beloved Andalusia, and live there together under the grapes and the olives with the saints and good Christians. We will leave this accursed place and that brigand, your father, and we will go where men know how to live and love."

"Yes, mamma, I should like that too," said Leam.

"Yes, you would like it, little one. The dances to the snapping castanets, and the bull-fights! Holy Virgin! it is fine to see the men and bulls—good bulls, brave bulls, with their man apiece killed and the horses made into mincemeat! You must like that, little Leama, else you are no true daughter of Andalusia, no child of Spain. It will be fine to see you at your first. It is better than the first communion, and something like it. A little pale and holding tight to my dress because you are only a young thing and not accustomed, and then your heart beating as if your lover was under your window. Would that we were there, away from this English hole of mud and that traitor, your father! Tell me, Leama, that you love me, little one, and hate him as much as I do."

"I love you, mamma, and only you, and what you hate I hate," answered Leam, her eyes kindling. "I am an Andalusian too."

"Good child! good Leama! never forget that. Hate goes farther than love. All good Spaniards know how to hate. Only fools love," said Pepita scornfully.

"Except you to me and me to you, mamma," said Leam, taking her hand and kissing it—that small, fat, dimpled hand with the taper fingers and pink nails, one of the most beautiful things in the world to Leam.

"Yes, yes! that is different. Mothers and daughters love each other. Holy Virgin! who should, if they do not? But that is another matter."

"And some fathers and daughters too, mamma?" said Leam interrogatively.

Her mother gave an angry scream that startled the sheep in the fields and the birds in the bushes. "No, no! not fathers and daughters!" she cried, crossing herself against the evil omen of such a thought. "My father beat me, and I hated him as much as I hate yours. No; fathers and husbands are tyrants: only mothers and lovers are good. Husbands are wretches. If I had a good Andalusian by me now, mine should learn something of the things of Spain he little

dreams of. When you have lovers, little Leama, I will tell you all, and how you are to manage. You must lead them a dance through the wood, and leave them there. Never let yourself love, but hold them at your feet. When they come I will teach you, but if you let yourself love, I will kill you."

"I shall never love, mamma," said Leam shuddering. "I am afraid of men. I will never leave you. You are different from any one else to me. It is another world to be with you."

"Because I have the sun in my blood," said Pepita, striking her hand on her arms. "I am not like these washed-out rags, these damp hens of Englishwomen. Nor are you, my little Leama! The saints be praised, you have your mother's eyes and your mother's heart. I could make you kill if I wanted you to kill; and some day I shall."

Leam was silent—not because she was shocked at her mother's words, but because she was frightened at her manner. She was always afraid to see her so excited as she was to-day. It made her look so strange, with her nostrils so red and distended and her eyes with that burning light behind them. And as often as not these furious moods ended in some fierce outbreak against Leam herself, whom her mother would beat into cruel bruises. Once she made her teeth meet in the child's lean brown arm. She carried the mark yet, and would always.

To-day, however, nothing of this happened, but for all the evening Pepita was restless and excited, repeating to herself, "A friend of my queen, at my court, in my country!" adding once, "I ought to love her for this; but she conquers me when I am with her, and I hate her when I am away from her."

Meanwhile, Mr. Dundas, still sitting with madame, expressed his interest in her travels and his wish to know all about her courtly residence in Spain.

"Willingly," she answered, and began, in the most natural way in the world, something about the queen and Aranjuez, Madrid and the Escurial; but before Mr. Dundas had fairly seized the meaning of what she said—for it was all put rather hazily—she had glided off into another track, and Spain was left behind like a dissolving view.

After this madame studied the map and the handbook yet more diligently, and made herself mistress of sundry details that carried weight. But she pronounced the words oddly for one who had lived at court, and spoke of Saint Jago and Don Quixote de la Mancha as if these were English names, and the letters composing them had the same sound and value in Castilian as they have in good Cockney English.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONLY FRANK.

"MADAME," cried Josephine, rushing into Madame de Montfort's early one afternoon in a state of brilliant excitement, "we have such good news from my brother!"

"Yes?" said madame, turning from white to red and then to white again, her face disturbed as Josephine had never seen it disturbed before. "You startled me," she added with a forced smile by way of explanation.

"I am so sorry, but I wanted to tell you: my brother is coming home," Josephine exclaimed, not connecting her friend's embarrassment with herself or her news.

Madame put her hand to her side. "Indeed!" she said faintly. "From India?"

"No, not Edgar: it is Frank who is coming down from London. He is coming next week: is not that delightful?" answered Josephine, still radiant and excited. "I wish it had been my darling Edgar," more soberly.

"Oh!" said madame drawing a deep breath, relieved, yet disappointed. "Only Frank!"

Josephine looked puzzled. "Yes, only Frank," she repeated. "But why 'only,' dear madame? Edgar is the eldest and my favorite, but Frank is Frank all the same, and a dear boy—such a nice fellow when you get to know him and don't mind his little affectations."

She laughed pleasantly. Even his

"little affectations" were not real blemishes to her affectionate eyes.

"Yes," said madame, who had recovered herself by now: "as you say, Frank is Frank, but he is in London, which is next door as it were, and could come down at any hour, while your brother Edgar is so far away that his return home would be a family jubilee indeed. More than a family jubilee," she added with her sweet graciousness of manner, including herself and all the world in the Hill future of rejoicing.

"Still, wanting Edgar, Frank is delightful," said Josephine, sticking to her point.

"Surely! so tell us all about it," answered madame, drawing a low chair close to her own for her guest, and making up her face to a listening receptive expression.

It was not the first time that Josephine had amused her new friend and made talk between them by telling her of these two brothers of hers whom she so frankly idolized. If she liked going to Lionnet for her own purposes, madame liked as much to have her. She was never tired of hearing all about "the boys," as Josephine called them; which showed what a sweet and comprehensive character she had, and how she was able to take that true sisterly interest in her friends' loves and feelings, even when quite apart from her own life, which is so sadly wanting in the mass of mankind.

She had heard all about Edgar by now—where he was, what he thought of doing, when he was expected home, and the like. She could never get to the bottom of the mystery why he had gone away so suddenly, when his place was manifestly at home after his father's death; but once, when Josephine had exhausted her small stock of conjectures, madame had looked up meekly from the baby on her lap, and had said in a questioning voice, as her contribution to the possibilities of the case, "Do you think he had any attachment in London when he spent the winter there, as you say, a year and a half ago? He might have fallen in love and got into trouble somehow, perhaps been refused; perhaps—but that does not seem very likely—been jilted?"

To which Josephine had answered earnestly, "Oh, I am sure there was nothing of the kind. We should have heard of it if there had been. Frank would have heard of it: he knew all Edgar's life, and he would have told us. No, I am sure there was no love-affair."

"That is conclusive, and shuts my poor little avenue at once," then had said madame with her placid smile. "But it only makes the mystery still more mysterious."

"And yet, if there had been a love-affair, and we had never heard of it, what a dreadful thing that would have been!" innocent Josephine had cried; and madame had closed the conversation by saying demurely, "Yes, dreadful indeed!"

"And when is your brother Frank, as you call him, coming down?" asked madame, going back to the initial circumstance of the conversation, after they had described Edgar and his present position and future prospects, his temper and his habits, when he was likely to return, and whom he was likely to marry, Josephine, with feminine treachery, on the point of saying to this last clause, "I know who would like to marry him—Adelaide Birkett," but refraining for the present moment, though she knew in her own heart it would come out some day.

"Next Monday," answered Josephine.

"Will he stay long?" madame inquired.

"We hope so; very likely he will be here for a month or six weeks."

Madame was silent a few minutes. "And how do you propose to amuse him?" she then said, keeping her eyes down. "Gentlemen need so much amusing."

"By a thousand pleasant ways," laughed the girl. "We will have a picnic to Dunaston Castle, and some girls to stay with us, and croquet parties, and," affectionately, "bring him to see you."

"Perhaps that would not amuse him," said madame. "It might be a nuisance instead."

But Josephine cried warmly, "No, no, no! it will be a delight: how can you doubt it?"

And as a further testimony to her as-

surance she got up and kissed the smooth, fair face, that had the most invincible dislike to be kissed. A sallow complexion stippled up to harmonize with dark hair, artificially bleached and bronzed, has naturally this invincible dislike to be kissed.

But madame was obliged to submit every now and then to the girl's embarrassing affectionateness, trusting to have time to repair the damaged tract before other callers should arrive. Being of the kind which balances all things in this life as so much to the good and so much to the bad, keeping a debtor and creditor account with annoyance and advantage, she took these unwelcome caresses as the tax she had to pay for the friendship of a Harrowby girl; which certainly counted for something to her good in the place.

Time went on, and the days and nights flowed silently together. The family at the Hill were pleasantly excited, and Carry Fairbairn was prettier than ever, because happier and more heartsome than ever. Madame was troubled, and yet she did the best to give herself courage, often saying to herself, "I have seen him only once, and then my hair was dark. He cannot recognize me as I am."

Still, the trouble continued, and the courage was at the most an attempt. So things went until the day when Frank arrived—Frank, the handsome, vain, affected young barrister, who thought his success in life depended more on his person and his manners than on his law and industry, coming down to his country relations as an act of condescension for which he expected to be paid, part in flattery and attention, part in a handsome cheque from his mother added to his allowance.

In London, to be sure, he made as much account of "his place" as if it had been Knole or Stoneleigh at the least, and exalted this country household of fairly good middle-class position into more than aristocratic value, placing it on the very apex of the county families. When he came down from London he gave himself the airs of court life stooping to rustication, and made his people almost believe that the metropolis was at his feet and that royalty itself went out of its way to do him honor. It was a way he had; but his heart was better than his head, and if he passed for a sort of social Adonis, he was really an honest gentleman underneath his disguise.

This annual visit of Frank's was the great event of the Harrowby year. The mother and sisters kept all their planned excursions, all invitations to pretty girl-guests, all extra festivities, until Frank should come down. And to do the handsome young fellow justice, he also did his best to make things go off briskly, and exerted himself to give an extra fillip to the usually rather heavy routine of the home junketings.

This time things went marvelously well. The weather was fine: there were two or three charming girls at the Hill and two or three pleasant men at the Limes. One day they made a picnic to Dunaston Castle; another time they undertook a three days' riding expedition to Grey Knowes, a famous place some forty miles away; Carry Fairbairn and Adelaide Birkett, both pretty girls, were constantly at the Hill, and Frank had never yet found himself overwhelmed with petticoats; but the new arrival, this Madame la Marquise de Montfort, whom the smart young barrister specially wished to see, had from a variety of causes been as yet invisible, and Frank's curiosity had increased in ratio with his disappointments.

Mrs. Harrowby, too, on her side, specially wished him to see her. She wanted him to propound from the heights of his London experience who she was and what she was, and more than once said she would feel quite satisfied with her clever son's opinion. If he endorsed this new-comer, then she felt sure they were safe; but if he pronounced against her—well, if he pronounced against her, what could she do? Unless she wished to make a division in the society, she must do just what she was doing now—countenance while she distrusted, and recognize under protest.

Nothing amused Frank more than to hear his mother discuss her perplexities;

wherein he never helped her. To tease her he used to say with his most candid air that it was so unlikely an adventuress, or even a person of doubtful antecedents, should come to North Aston, where there were no old gentlemen to gull and no young ones to victimize, he was prepared to find madame all she had represented herself to be—a sorrowing widow whose means had diminished, burying herself in the country for mingled grief and economy, and casting anchor at North Aston emphatically by a fluke. But this was only for the sake of contradiction and argument. Having had a tolerably varied experience in London, and being, moreover, judicially minded on his own account, he secretly believed that Madame la Marquise de Montfort would turn out no better than she should be, and that all these dear stupid folks of his were simply more or less taken in by an adventuress.

Still, he could not decide on the matter, for madame had become strangely invisible of late. Frank Harrowby's arrival had sent her to the upper chambers whence she could command a view of the road, and she rivaled Mrs. Dundas in the cool audacity with which she denied herself while seated concealed behind the curtains. She had been diligent in returning the Harrowby call when she had seen Frank safely on the moorland road and knew that he could not return for another hour or two, and she had been sweetly distressed at the misfortune of his perpetual absence—also of her own—for her dear friend Josephine talked so often of her brothers, she had said with a smile, she seemed almost to know them in one way, and she was really anxious to know them in another. It was so unfortunate, too, that when the rector gave his dinner-party on Frank's arrival, and she was asked and had accepted, she had such a wretched headache she could not possibly go down.

But the lady of the Hill had set her mind on this meeting, and for once madame had to acknowledge her master. She could not help herself: she must go to the Harrowby dinner got up for Frank next week. If she had continual headaches just at this moment, it would look suspicious; and she must avoid suspicion as carefully as—detection. Had she been in London with a friendly doctor at her elbow, she would probably have had a rather severe attack of measles, but here she was unable to be shunted on such a plea; and accordingly, when Mrs. Harrowby's note arrived requesting the favor, Madame la Marquise was forced to reply, accepting with pleasure, and forced also to go when the day came.

She was desperately disturbed—it might almost be called terrified—at the thought of this meeting; but when the time came she took her courage in her two hands as usual, and threw herself on the good luck which had befriended her so generously until now. She was very pale when she entered the drawing-room, where the whole of the guests had assembled. She had come rather late purposely. As she had to run the risk, the woman's vanity in her made her desire to run it with the greatest amount of glory; and she knew that she came into a room gracefully and looked well when in movement.

The faces which met her as she entered appeared like a very sea. Her nervousness had multiplying powers of painful extent, and the fourteen people who turned and looked at this late-coming sinner, for whom they were all waiting and all hungry, seemed to her at the least fifty. But out from the crowd she singled at a glance Frank, standing superbly at the fireplace watching her entrance. Her heart stood still. How like he was his elder brother! and yet slighter, darker, brighter. Edgar was the handsomer man of the two, a bigger-built man, and with a head and face expressive of more thought, and maybe self-will. Frank was keener, lither, more mobile, more pretentious: he affected more the airs of a man of fashion and the bearing of a man of the (London) world. If Edgar affected anything, it was rather the bearing of the typical Englishman, despotic and high-handed, knowing better than any one else everything under heaven—absolutely right, despising superstition, but down before

conventionalism, and, though contemptuous of the mind and purposes of women, to be managed by the first clever hussy who chose to lay her finger-tips on his.

After interchanging greetings with those whom she knew, madame, as white as the lappets of her widow's cap, turning her head in obedience to the voice of her hostess, set herself steadily to her ordeal, raised her eyes and looked full into Frank's face as he bowed and she swept herself and her garments into a graceful curve at the formal introduction which made them acquainted—for the second time. He looked at her narrowly, with a puzzled expression in his face; while she, every nerve strung to the utmost, met his eyes with as much of the frank indifference of ignorance as she could assume, but her lips were tightly closed, and the hand which held her fan grasped it like a band of steel. No one, not even Frank, saw this: that smooth outside of hers hid so much and was so thickly laid. Dinner was announced almost immediately after this; and Frank, giving madame his arm, led her out as the first lady, an odd kind of doubt running very distinctly through his mind as to whether she was entitled to this place or not, and if he was not dishonoring by implication the ladies of known safety and respectability thus assigned to walk in her train.

All through that dinner Frank looked and pondered, haunted with a likeness that escaped him just as he wished to verify it, feeling sure that he had seen her before; but where? when? how? When he asked himself these questions his memory answered nothing and the past was a blank. She, equal to her dangers—as indeed was she not always? —talked to her companion in her smooth, pleasant way, but so vaguely as to facts, opinions, people, that Frank felt her conversation to be like her past personality, a kind of impalpable cloud wherein nothing was defined and nothing sure. She was exceedingly careful during this talk, committed herself to nothing, mentioned no names, but referred only to generalizations as "friends of mine," evidently persons of wealth and standing, but not tabulated, until she cast anchor on the Spanish queen, surely a safe harborage with any North Astonian. She spoke of her with her usual glib facility, with the respectful familiarity of an intimate; and to clinch her position went into the plot —which was really a plot some years ago —when the queen was to have been taken in her box at the opera and carried out of the country, and was saved from her fate by the intervention of an Englishman. Madame gave the details fairly enough: she only changed the personality, and made herself the intervening power. But Frank, who was an accurate present-day historian and knew all about the plot in question, looked into her face and said in a surprised tone, "How extraordinary! One never does know the rights of things. I thought it had been an Englishman who had warned the queen."

"So it was," answered madame with calm composure. "But it was me who warned him."

"An unrecorded heroine of unwritten history?" he laughed, and she slightly flushed.

"Oh," she said with her noble air, "I do not care to be spoken about. It is enough to do the good, not to have it made public."

"As you have been to Spain, of course you speak Spanish?" then said Frank, who knew about half a dozen words.

"I have forgotten all my Spanish," she answered with a pretty little laugh. "So stupid of me, is it not? It is from want of practice. I must get it up again—really I must."

"Madame speaks French?" then probed that merciless social surgeon in pure Parisian, the same to him as his mother-tongue.

Madame smiled in a kind of deprecating way as she shook her head, answering, with playful reproach, "Fie! who does such a rude thing as to speak a foreign language at table?"

It was the best fence she could have made in the circumstances, but it betrayed her all the same.

Frank smiled and turned his bright eyes on her keenly. She smiled back

an answer suavely, tranquilly, though her heart had sunk like lead.

"Don't you agree with me?" she asked.

"I accept the rebuke," he answered with mock humility: "premising, however, that your indignation is undeserved, as there is no one here who cannot speak French fluently: therefore you may, if you like, begin the conversation in that tongue and we will all follow you."

"It is very charming to find such facility," answered madame graciously. "It reminds me of my friend Madame Espartero. She was the most accomplished woman for languages I ever knew; so too was my queen Isabella."

"Indeed?" said Frank. "I thought Her Most Catholic Majesty had been an intensely ignorant woman."

"Not at all," said madame. "Ask Mrs. Dundas."

"One savage of another?" returned Frank. "Xantippe of Messalina?"

Madame smiled. The waters were very deep about her, and she wished fervently she were on dry land, safe with those who loved her, did not care to probe, and who accepted her *quand même*, hazy literature and catholic experience, slips of grammar and incontrovertible assertions of persons, all with the same unquestioning faith. Nevertheless, as it would not do to show that she was either afraid or distanced, she said quietly, "Do you like Mrs. Dundas?" and looked at her across the table,

"Who can like Xantippe?" said Frank with a shrug.

"Is that her name?" asked madame.

But she spoke in so matter-of-fact a manner that Frank was left uncertain whether it was covert satire or crass ignorance, and merely laughed back his reply, by which she gained breathing-time and drove the conversation on to familiar ground—the Park in the season and last year's Royal Academy. She had remembered some of the leading pictures well; but for a woman who was herself a sufficiently good artist to have painted those water-colors which Mr. Dundas had helped to mount and frame, she showed herself wonderfully ignorant of some popular technicalities. She made some odd blunders, too, that were remarkable. In speaking of a picture of "Hercules and Omphale," she ran the former word into two syllables, and the latter she pronounced as if it was Umfle; she made a wild shot about Columbus, and spoke of him as an Englishman, which was queer, taking into account both her American and Spanish experiences; and she confounded Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart in a manner that was, to say the least of it, singular in a person of her station and presumed education. Frank caught her blunders and led her on. He got her to pity beautiful Mary Stuart for Philip's ill behavior, and then for his death; to condemn her treatment of her younger sister, Elizabeth, and to be not at all astonished that the queen should avenge the princess and cut off her head, with Calais engraven on her heart. In a word, he gauged her, and he found the measure shallow enough. And all the time poor madame was vaguely conscious that things were going wrong, though she made heroic efforts to right them, and if she showed her ignorance, showed also her cleverness.

She left on Frank a composite kind of feeling. He distrusted her, and yet he admired her. He felt as if he had seen her before, but her true personality evaded him. She was not an educated woman, but her manners were graceful and her habits those of one accustomed to refined society. She had a subtle tinge of something worse than Bohemianism in her appearance, but nothing could be more modest than her looks and conversation. She was evidently guarding a secret while she seemed to be most candid; and when she was apparently on the point of giving a clue the end broke and the thread was lost. She was a mystery—of that he was certain—whether an evil mystery or one only unfortunate he had no means to discover; still, she was a mystery, and that was more than North Aston wanted.

"Well, Frank, what of Madame de Montfort?" asked the mother when the evening was over and the family had collected together to discuss how it had gone and the like. "Who is she, my dear?"

"That is hard to say," Frank answered. "Who she is not is pretty evident: she is not an educated woman, though she is in some things a lady. It seems to me that I have seen her somewhere, but I cannot tell where, and I don't wholly like her looks. There is something *louche* about her, and I would have you all take care of her."

"Oh," said Josephine, "and she is so nice!"

"So is the vampire-bat, my dear, when it fans you to sleep and sucks your great toe," replied Frank. "Mind, I don't say she is bad, and she may be the widow of the Marquis de Montfort, for anything I know: that is a fact easily verified. But, widow or no widow, she is queer; and if I can read faces she is both false and artificial."

"I cannot think why you should say so, and on only once seeing her," remonstrated Josephine.

"But if Frank does say so, he is likely to be correct, with his experience," said Fanny.

"And it is just what we and mamma have always told you, Josephine; but you are so infatuated about this woman!" said Maria.

"Then why do you ask her to the house if you think her so bad?" urged Josephine, almost in tears.

Whereat her sisters rebuked her for impertinence, as their manner was.

"No," said Frank, drawing her to him kindly; "she is only logical without knowing it. If we did the absolutely right thing, we should decline to receive her here without credentials; but," shrugging his handsome shoulders, "who of us does the absolutely right thing? And one may be too hard on the poor sinner—if sinner she is—as I should say she was by her looks."

Whence it may be seen that Frank did not add much to the enlightenment of his mother's perplexities, and that he left the question pretty much where he found it. Nevertheless, though he never committed himself to an opinion as to who madame really was, he stood stoutly to his major proposition that she was queer, also that he doubted and distrusted her; and he always ended by vaguely counseling his people to be wary of her and careful not to get entangled with her too deeply. This done, he would go off to Lionnet and do a little bit of delving on his own account. But Madame de Montfort was as clever as he; and he merely lost his time when he attempted to dig out from the secret recesses of the fair stranger's past any information she had made up her mind to withhold.

"Which proves she has something to conceal," said Frank, lawyer though he was unmindful of the legal maxims which rule that no man is bound to criminate himself, and that all accused are to be held innocent till proved guilty.

PART III.

CHAPTER IX.

LAS COSAS DE ESPAÑA.

IT would have been strange if Frank's opinion of Madame de Montfort had been anything but unfavorable. He was too young yet not to wish to air his superior knowledge when he could, and too vain not to like to show himself wiser than the world which in early days had held him in subjection. He was one of those young infallibles who despise things ancient simply because they are ancient, and who think the human nature that has arisen since they came to their majority a different kind of thing from what it was thirty years ago. When they go down to the old place to save money and enjoy themselves, they go down as reformers and iconoclasts, finding everything in use there, material and mental, exploded and behind the age, and setting themselves to the task of indoctrinating the stupid natives with new views of life and new adjustments everywhere. According to them, every one is in the dark till they appear. When they do appear they generally throw the whole place into confusion, and end by evolving modern discords out of antique harmonies.

Given a stranger without vouchers, received by the unsuspecting North Astonians as one of themselves, and it would have been impossible for Frank not to have condemned. She might have been a Saint Dorothea in momentary eclipse, or a Queen Berengaria with her crown hidden for the day: all the same, the young barrister would have shaken his curly head like a second Lord Burleigh, and would have pronounced her through his eyeglass as no better than she should be. When it came to a golden-headed, handsome-faced woman of great cleverness and small information, who made bad shots about Columbus, and did not know the difference between the Stuart Mary and the Tudor—a lady who had lived at the Spanish court, where she had been on terms of intimacy with the queen, and yet could not speak Spanish, nor yet French—then Frank was perhaps justified in his suspicion that all was not as it appeared, and that the things pertaining to madame would not bear close examination. But there was no denying that as time went on, and the marquise baffled him more and more completely, he became unnecessarily bitter and made the most of his case.

Yet, as poor Josephine used to say, half tearfully, half petulantly, "What good did it do to speak against madame as he did? He said over and over again that he could not advise them to cut her. She had been admitted, and now they could not discard her without cause. Why, then, need he make them all uncomfortable about her, and put things into their heads they would never have thought of but for him? It seemed to her so wrong, in one way or another! She felt that it was treacherous to visit madame one day and vilify her the next, and she thought it would be far better to say nothing at all, or to act on their words." By which Josephine proved herself undoubtedly the honestest and most reasonable of the whole Hill household.

But as she was without home influence, being the youngest daughter, and of a credulous, affectionate kind of nature, which laid her open to ridicule, her remonstrances went for nothing. They might be true, but, true or not, they were "only what Josephine says," and carried no more weight than what the birds sang on the housetops.

In one thing, however, she gained her point—namely, that they should tell no one in the place how Frank suspected madame of unknown evil and counseled vague distrust; and she pleaded for this so earnestly and with so much pathos and sincerity that she induced them all to promise; and the Harrowby word was as good as most people's bonds.

But Adelaide Birkett found it out from Josephine herself. Weak, good-natured, plastic Joseph, as her friends called her, had no hard places which the rector's clever daughter could not knead, no closed doors which she could not open. She learnt the whole thing three days after the dinner-party, and under the strictest vows of secresy. Whether she would keep her vows of secresy depended on those monsters of mystery, unforeseen circumstances. If it suited her purpose, she would not tell that young Frank Harrowby *knew* Madame de Montfort to be an ignorant adventuress, for that is how she would have put it: if it did not, she would proclaim it. Adelaide was not hampered by the inconvenient impediment of ultra honor, and thought all things fair in war if she might have demurred to a few in love.

Never a very responsible kind of person, Pepita seemed to be fast losing the little self-control she had ever had; and the odd fascination which madame had for her, as for others, might have almost excused the Spaniard's belief that it was witchcraft and unholy. At home to Leam, and when free from the restraining power of her presence, she found no words too strong to say of her, no abuse too bad, no superstitious terror too intense at the power she had over her; but by some subtle magnetism, certainly not voluntarily exerted by madame, she was drawn almost daily to Lionnet, where she did no good for herself, and was a nuisance to all concerned. She got no substantial talk about Spain or the Spaniards, which was what she went for—the illusory bait that was always dangling before her eyes and never caught—and she interrupted the easy flow of madame's suave enchantment over her landlord and cut short the rector's spiritual exhortations.

Mr. Dundas found his charming occupation of handyman about the place gone without recall when his wife was by, watching him with those jealous eyes of hers, which saw all they were not wanted to see, and imagined more than they saw; the rector's lessons of good counsel, composed and delivered for the special benefit of his ewe-lamb, fell flat and without application when shared with the woman who held he should be burnt, and with a child who only stared and did not speak; while as for soft-hearted Josephine—who still, in spite of wiser home advice, was oftener at Lionnet than she should have been—she was frightened from her holding by the advent of a woman who every now and then swooped down on her as on the rest, and told her coarsely that although she was only a white mouse, with a gesture of contempt, she should not make eyes like that at her husband.

But the Spaniard neither saw nor cared for the small social earthquake she brought in her pocket, save indeed that she had always a savage kind of pleasure in insulting Birkett, as she called him, and annoying Josephine and Dundas; so she went again and again to beseech madame to talk to her of Spain, of El Corte, the bull-fights and the gracious majesty under whose august shadow she had lived; of Andalusia and her father's house; of the saints and the priests who were priests—to talk to her of the only country where the sun shone, and which said its prayers as prayers should be said—the only country where life was life, and men and women lived as Christians, and not as pigs and heathens.

"Talk to me of Spain," was Pepita's one standing passionate prayer—"my glorious Spain, where I was so happy, and which I was such a fool to leave."

To which madame invariably made answer in her smooth way, "Willingly, señora," but by some inexplicable mechanism of conversation as invariably glided off into another topic, leaving her fiery guest with the feeling of a thirsty Tantalus, seeing the fresh waters close to him, but unable to drink of them—mocked by promises kept to the ear and broken to the hope.

All this time Mrs. Dundas lived in an ever-increasing fever. The turbulent nostalgia, mingled with hate and jealousy and restless vague desire, that possessed her, broke up the somnolent indolence of her daily habits. Never able

to occupy herself, now that the daylight sleep which had kept her quiet for at least eight hours out of the conventional sixteen had gone, she had only people on whom to fall back, and of these people only Madame la Marquise de Montfort pleased her.

The North Aston community might well say to each other, "Good Heavens! the infliction that woman would have been had she been social and energetic!"

Poor Madame de Montfort! Her *corvée* at this time was heavy. It took all her strong powers of self-control to retain the sweetness and placidity of demeanor proper to the rôle she had cast for herself in the drama she had inaugurated at North Aston. But she wisely reflected that whoso permits another to disturb him is so far that other's creature, and the weaker of the two; and as she prided herself on her absolute supremacy over weakness, prejudice, mankind and herself, she would not allow even Pepita's daily presence to ruffle her smooth plumage. She never suffered herself to show the Spaniard how intensely her questions bored her—still less, how they taxed her wits to evade while seeming to meet them frankly and to answer them with candor. For madame's facts were curious things in their way, and scarcely able to bear close scrutiny. Not the cleverest synchronizer of the century could have made her dates agree; and not the acutest historic genius, diligent in his search after the ruling law, could have deprived her stories of their phenomenal character. It was well for her that the North Astonians were neither chronologists nor critics, and that she shot her arrows into space where they hit no man's target when she described the places she had never seen, told of the things that had never happened, and spoke of her dear friends the queens and princesses whom she knew only as a street-gazer by sight.

Leam was always with her mother on these visits of infliction. Indeed, Pepita was too jealous to allow the child to be out of her presence by night or by day; and the real reason why Leam was so ignorant was because no governess would or could remain at Andalusia Cottage. What between her suspicious belief that her false-hearted Sebastian lived by saying soft things in dark corners, and her dread lest even the raggedest edges of Leam's affection should envelop a stranger, Pepita's fiery heart had ever been in a tempest during the stay of each successive mistress and rival, and the tempest she had felt she had passed on to others. Mr. Dundas, who cared less for his daughter than for ease of personal living—that is, as much ease as was possible with such a tumultuous domestic difficulty as his wife—gave up the contest when Leam was about twelve years of age, saying in self-justification, when his friends ventured to remonstrate, "She is her mother's child, not mine, and I can do no more with the one than with the other."

Though Leam went every day to Lionnet with her mother, no one there knew her the better for her frequency of presence. Sometimes Josephine Harrowby would try to take her in hand to see what she was like. But even she, good-natured and simple-hearted, and by no means on such mental heights as need have frightened the girl, had to confess that she could make nothing of her. Madame had given up the attempt long ago, and had not cared to renew it. Leam used to sit with her mournful eyes fixed on her mother—that mother's younger likeness—like a soul in pain oppressed with a very incubus of love and sorrow, watching her with a gaze half frightened, half adoring, only longing for her to be silent and let them go away and be together and alone again, but afraid to utter a sound or to make a sign.

In the circle of suffering with which this unhappy Pepita surrounded her world, the child whom she loved with such intensity perhaps suffered the most. Life was like a hideous nightmare to Leam at this time, and she came into more inner consciousness than she had ever yet had from the new kind of fear that possessed her—not of, so much as for, her mother. How glad she would be when the summer was over! she

thought. Her mother would not surely go out so much then, and they would return to the old happy indolent life to which Leam was getting so dangerously accustomed—with nothing to think of, nothing to do, no one to see or to talk to, only dolls to dress and the zambomba to strike. How she hated all these people! Josephine Harrowby was perhaps the least detestable, but she was only a white mouse, as mamma called her, with veins filled with milk and flesh made of curds. But madame and the rector, how odious they were! and how tiresome and detestable they all were when they would speak to her and she never knew what to answer!

It was all very well to go sometimes to see madame and talk to her of *las cosas de España*, she thought, but every day was too much even for Leam's patriotism of imagination; and she had never mentally accused her mother of bad taste before.

Leam, in the full force of youthful thoroughness, thought her mother's honesty of speech and unrestrained savagery of candor the grandest qualities in the world. She was mamma, and had a right to say and do as she liked. But why she abandoned her old habits for this new woman—why she went there day after day, sat still and kept quiet, and was amiable and self-restrained when she hated her in her heart, and said so as soon as she left the house—was a mystery beyond the girl's power to divine. She looked, wondered, sighed, lamented; but her pathetic eyes pleaded in vain. Not even for Leam could Pepita forego her desires; and her knowledge of how much her little daughter suffered in this sudden uprooting of her life's habits affected her no more than if it was the disquiet of a dream, and Madame la Marquise de Montfort was the sole reality of life.

CHAPTER X.

THE POMEGRANATE BUD.

ONE day Pepita and Leam went to Lionnet as usual. As usual, also, Pepita began to pound madame in her interrogatory mortar on *las cosas de España*, while madame gathered up the skirts of her wits to enable her to slip from under the pestle so dexterously that she should not show she had slipped at all—attempting that most difficult feat of intellectual gymnastics, how to satisfy critical curiosity without betraying ignorance. While the one was thus occupied in questioning, and the other in evading while seeming to reply, Mrs. Corfield and her son Alick came in.

No one, judging by the light of Nature and the doctrine of hereditary characteristics, would have said that these were mother and son. Mrs. Corfield's small spare figure, bird-like in its activities and jerky in its movements, had not transmitted a line of itself to her son's lumbering, elephantine form, measuring six feet two, military standard; and her sharp face, with its keen black eyes set, monkey-like, close together, razor-shaped nose, thin lips and untiring mobility, was as little repeated in his as was the plan of the bony framework. His eyes were large, light-gray, uncertain, wandering; his nose was a blunt unfinished knob cast roughly against his face, and not gone over with the modeling tool; and his mouth, uneven and out of drawing, was large and clumsy, with cracked and swollen lips. His manners were shy, his gestures slow and sprawling; but even those who laughed at him most were forced to acknowledge that if the crock was homely the treasure it held was of the finest gold. It was impossible to allow Alick Corfield the smallest artistic merit, but it was also as impossible not to admit that if the most awkward fellow that ever shambled on two ungainly legs, he was one of the best and purest-hearted. He was a modern Beast, as yet wanting the Beauty which should bring him into noble shape.

By the look of things he was not likely to find her at North Aston; for even Carry Fairbairn's catholic philanthropy deserted her when Alick Corfield meandered across her path; and if Carry Fairbairn could not tolerate him, who would? But ever since she had been teased at

home about his manifest admiration for her—he had once had a kind of romantic worship for the "wild rose," as he used to call her in his unpublished sonnets, which had made him supremely ridiculous—she had treated him as disdainfully as if he had insulted her. It had had one good effect—that of curing him of his boyish fancy and dispelling the delusive moonshine that had begun to gather in a misleading aureole about her pretty, curly, brainless head.

Kept in such strict seclusion by her mother for the one part, shy, ignorant, taciturn on her own account for the other, Leam, though a native born and bred, was, as has been said, substantially a stranger to North Aston.

This was the first time for three years that Alick or Mrs. Corfield had met her; for, as she never went to church, and until the odd craze of her mother for madame as little anywhere else, she was not likely to be known of the local confraternity, and her presence at Lionnet to-day had all the charms that lie round novelty.

"What an odd figure!" thought Sarah Corfield as she stared at the child sitting there in her mantilla, with her square bow of blue-and-white ribbon stuck in the thick coils of her dark hair. "What a shame of Sebastian Dundas to let that maniac of his dress up his daughter like a dancing-girl at a fair! I will soon put all that to rights when I get her into my hands, as I will."

"How beautiful!—like an unopened pomegranate bud, a young queen among the flowers, not knowing her own royalty," thought Alick, whose dangerous trick of idealizing and delicate poetic fancy, such as by the unjust analogy of appearances no one would have expected from such an unfinished exterior, were powerfully excited by the sight of this dark-eyed, silent, superb young child of Spain.

Mrs. Corfield, intent on her work of reconstruction, made her way straight to Leam. "Why, Leam! you are quite a stranger, child," she said with that familiarity of older folks who have seen the young people in long clothes, and have consequently no kind of respect for them; to whom, indeed, these young people are always in a manner children whom it would be absurd to treat with respect.

Leam looked at her with the unutterable tragedy of expression bestowed on her by Nature. "Yes," she said briefly.

"One never sees you, child: what do you do with yourself all day?" continued Mrs. Corfield, thinking how she could best work round to her ultimate intention, that of vilifying her headgear.

"Mamma does not go out," said Leam reluctantly. Why should this little, sharp-faced woman persecute her with her talk?

"But if your mamma cannot go out—though I must say it would be a great deal better for her if she did—why do you not come amongst your young friends? It is not good to be shut up as you are. You should be with the other girls, like one of them. You make yourself quite singular, hiding yourself as you do."

"Mamma does not go out," repeated Leam.

"But you ought, if she does not," reiterated Mrs. Corfield.

Leam looked a set speech in blank verse. By her face you might have said she was oppressed with noble thoughts, keeping back by an effort a flood of eloquent speech. In reality she was saying to herself, "What does this little rat-tooth wish me to say?"

"I am giving a lawn-party the day after to-morrow," continued Mrs. Corfield, needlessly alarmed at the girl's tragic expression and unspoken Alexandrines. "Now come to it, like a good child, and don't hide yourself away in this absurd manner. Take off that lace thing and take off that funny bow: they don't become you, and they look odd in the daytime, and make the other girls laugh at you. Put on a nice rational English hat and feather, and come among us like a sensible creature, as I dare say you are when you are found out. But, good gracious! you might be some heathen princess of Morocco for what anybody knows of you. And when one does see you, you are so unlike any one else one scarcely knows what to make of you. You are not a bit like

an English girl in that absurd dress of yours."

"I am not English," said Leam proudly, her face on fire.

"Why, you silly child, how can you be anything else?" laughed Mrs. Corfield. "Your father is English: what should you be but English?"

"Mamma is a Spaniard — an Andalusian," said Leam, fixing her mournful eyes on Mrs. Corfield steadily.

"But don't you know that the nationality of the children follows the father, not the mother?" returned the lady with her argumentative air, settling the matter beyond dispute.

"I am Spanish," repeated Leam, impervious to argument.

"Tut! tut! don't I tell you that the nationality of the children follows the father, not the mother?" reiterated Mrs. Corfield, setting herself to her task of proving and convincing. "You were born in England, brought up in England, your father is an English landed proprietor, as were his fathers before him: how should you not be an English girl? The mere fact of having a Spanish mother alters none of these things. You are English, root and branch, and no talking in the world could make you otherwise."

"Mamma is a Spaniard and I am a Spaniard," again said Leam, doggedly, pertinaciously.

"What an obstinate little monkey you are!" cried Mrs. Corfield, half impatient, half amused.

"I may be a monkey, but I am a Spaniard all the same," repeated Leam with grave disdain. "And I would rather be a Spanish monkey than an English miss," she added, looking at her mother.

To which Mrs. Corfield snapped out, in a tone that meant unconditional repudiation of so hopeless a subject, "I believe you are right, Leam. There is nothing English about you but your name, and that is not a Christian one, like any other girl's—called after a river like a heathen goddess. I wonder how your father could?"

"No, it is not like another's, and I am glad," answered Leam, her proud, persistent little face set like a mask.

Mrs. Corfield, who disliked opposition, turned away in a rage. Though a good soul, none better, she had an irritable temper — "tangential," as the doctor mildly called her when she swept the dust about his ears—and especially was she tangential when opposed by the young.

"What is that crooked stick of an Englishwoman saying to you, my heart?" cried out Pepita in Spanish.

She knew her daughter's face as well as her daughter knew hers.

"She says I am English, mamma," said Leam with an air of pathetic pride.

Pepita turned furiously to Mrs. Corfield. "No, you are wrong," she cried in a loud voice. "You English are the children of Judas, and we are the daughters of the blessed St. Jago. I should hate my little Leama if I thought she was degraded to the level of the frogs we live amongst as the purgatory for our sins. We are children of Andalusia, beautiful Andalusia, she and I: we have the sun in our blood—you have only frogs and frosts."

"Do not be angry with us if we wish to claim your daughter," said madame graciously. "She is too beautiful a prize to be parted with. You too, as the wife of an Englishman, belong to us. If you do not like your captivity, you are none the less a captive, and have to wear the chain of flowers which binds you."

This was said very sweetly, but madame knew that Pepita hated her captivity; and did not believe her chain to be one of flowers.

"One misfortune need not make two," said Pepita, with more sense of dialectics than she had credit for. "If I was unlucky enough to make myself the wife of an Englishman, I need not have the disgrace of your nationality added to it."

"Still, for very love of you we must claim you," continued madame with her fluent smoothness.

"And for want of love of you I say that neither I nor mine belongs to you," cried Pepita, snapping her fingers.

"You need not get angry, Mrs. Dundas," put in her husband with an insulting

air. "If madame is gracious enough to say kind things to you, that does not prove anything. We English may not be so anxious to claim you, after all."

"And at all events, dear señora," added Madame de Montfort soothingly, "our admiration of you cannot offend you, and you are a Spaniard all the same. Still, it is good to conform to the customs of the country where you are. The queen said those very words to me the last time I saw her in Paris. 'Ah, little one!' she said—the dear gracious saint!—'though I am a Spaniard to my heart's core, these good Parisians would not know me from one of themselves. It is the wisdom of life.' And what she says we may believe, may we not, señora?"

"There is sense in that," said Pepita sulkily.

But the charm was wrought, and she was silent and subdued for the next few minutes. The "loyalty" of the low-bred, ignorant worshiper of rank was as strong in her as a religion; and if the queen had advocated murder, Pepita would have canonized the assassins. Perhaps that would not have cost her much moral effort, on the whole. The struggle would have been if, by some miracle, Isabella had discarded the saints and the Holy Father and had insisted on adherence to pigs and Protestants.

"You have never been to Spain, Miss Dundas, have you?" asked Alick, shambling up to Leam, at whom he had been staring all this time.

She looked at him for an instant, then turned away her eyes with girlish scorn. Though no shadow of the manly life had as yet been thrown across her path, and though she was therefore supremely indifferent to men's homeliness or their beauty, yet Alick Corfield was so uncompromisingly ugly she could not forbear to despise him, and to show that she did. Then she turned her eyes to her mother, so beautiful to look at—the centre of all life and charm to her.

"No," she answered shortly, "not yet."

"Not yet? Then you are going some time?" he said in a grieved voice.

He thought North Aston would be duller than it had ever been if Leam Dundas left it, now that he had seen her. The little royal unopened pomegranate blossom that she was, she had stirred his fancy like a new poem. And indeed was she not a new poem?—a poem no one had yet read, but into which he might some day—who knows?—have rich and lovely glimpses if only he could break down that shyness, that exclusiveness and that contempt of her father's race which kept her so far apart, like a stranger in her own home.

"Of course," said Leam superbly. How could he ask such a silly question?

"When?"

She looked at him even more scornfully than before. "When I am a woman," she said. "Mamma and I will live in Spain then."

"And leave England?"

"Yes: I hate England."

"Oh, I hope you will not always hate it," said Alick, writhing awkwardly on his chair and blushing painfully.

"I always shall," Leam answered solemnly: "mamma hates it."

"But you know so little of it," pleaded Alick.

"I know it all; and it is all horrid," said Leam.

"What! North Aston?" he cried.

"Yes, horrid and ugly too," she said stonily.

"Why, it is lovely!" exclaimed Alick with enthusiastic remonstrance.

"You talk nonsense," returned Leam in her grave superiority. "Mamma says it is ugly, and mamma knows."

"Indeed, Miss Dundas—" began Alick.

"I am la señorita," interrupted Leam with supreme pride: "I am a Spanish señorita, not an English miss."

"I beg your pardon, señorita," continued Alick—Leam looked at him with an air of tragic satisfaction—"but indeed you cannot know the scenery about North Aston, else you could not call it ugly," he urged again. "There are some of the most splendid views you can imagine about here—from the top of Steel's Wood, on the moor, by the Water's Meet, from Dunaston—oh, many places! And then the wild flowers! We have the most exquisite flowers here—rare ones,

too, not found anywhere else in England."

"Wild flowers?" repeated Leam. "There are no flowers in England."

Alick smiled uneasily.

"One or two in hothouses perhaps," said Leam with scornful condescension, "but they are not so good as ours."

"I assure you we have wild flowers," said Alick in a boyish, eager kind of way. "There are hundreds here—beautiful flowers, quite as lovely as the garden ones. You ought to ramble about the woods and fields, and then you would see them."

Leam shook her head. "Mamma says there are none, and mamma knows," she repeated as before.

"But, indeed—" began Alick again.

"I do not believe you," said Leam.

"Will you believe me if I bring you a basketful to-morrow?" asked Alick. He had taken it to heart to convince this skeptical little girl-queen that England held objects worthy of her regard.

Leam shook her head again. "I do not want to believe," she said.

"But you want to know the truth?" urged Alick.

"Oh no, I do not," answered Leam.

"Not want to know the truth?" repeated Alick, aghast—he to whom the most literal exactness was part of the necessity of life.

"No," said Leam stolidly. "What good does it do?"

"But the truth is all we have to live for," cried Alick. "If we have not truth we have nothing."

"I do not know what you mean," said Leam with a sigh of weariness. The strain on her mental faculties by so much talking was getting beyond her, even in its simpler aspect: going into the region of abstract ethics was more than she could bear. "One tells lies when one must, and one must very often," she added.

Alick got very red, and shifted on his chair uneasily. That men should tell falsehoods on occasion seemed to him one of the most mournful facts of human history—a vice leading to all manner of crimes, itself perhaps the greatest. But that a person should openly confess not only to the need but the practice of falsehood, and that person his girl-queen, his unread poem, gave him a moral shock he could not for a moment overcome. He was glad his mother had not heard her. He himself graduated in his first lesson of concealment, his first step too of independent life, in this content that his mother had not heard Leam Dundas confess she did not care for truth, and told lies when it suited her.

"What are you saying to my daughter?" asked Pepita jealously. "I do not like young men to talk to my daughter apart. We Andalusian mothers are not like your English women, who let their daughters run to the right and the left with no one to look after them. We take care of ours, and ask the Holy Mother to help us."

Poor Alick blushed again, painfully as before. To his honest heart there was no more harm in talking to Leam, or in idealizing her as his pomegranate bud, than there was in looking at the sunlight on the lawn. "I was saying nothing," he stammered in inexplicable confusion.

"Then you must be very stupid to sit and talk and say nothing," said pitiless Pepita. "A Spaniard would not be so absurd," contemptuously.

"He said that there were flowers here, mamma—wild in the woods," said Leam, turning her grave face to her mother and speaking in the tone of one morally injured.

"Flowers!" cried Pepita with unutterable disdain. "We call those things weeds in Spain."

"There!" said Leam triumphantly, "I told you so."

"You should see our flowers in Spain," then cried Pepita, following up the strain, but not ill-temperedly. "Those are flowers—not like these miserable little drops of white and yellow you call daisies and buttercups, but pomegranates, and myrtles, and orange-flowers, and oleanders. Ah! those are flowers — with roses you can bury your face in, and jessamines as big as stars. And the fruit! You call your sour green stones fruit! A Spaniard would give them to his enemy's pigs when he wanted to poison them."

"I know how beautiful things must be in Spain, and I should like to go there and see them all," answered Alick. "But if we have not got things so good in England, it is only wise to make the best of what we have, is it not? We cannot all be Spaniards," he added, as if he would have been one if he could. Perhaps he would, to be Leam's compatriot.

"No," said Pepita, as if this was a profound reflection to which she assented on mature consideration, "heaven is not for all, and cows cannot be lions."

"Nor wild roses pomegranates," returned Alick, mentally contrasting Carry Fairbairn with Leam Dundas.

Pepita stared at him. Something in his homely face seemed to waken a kindly chord in her rough-hewn heart. "You are ugly," she said frankly, "but you look good. You may come and see me if you don't stay too long or come too often."

Mrs. Corfield heard this conditional invitation. She had already forgiven Leam, and was pleased to see these two odd creatures take kindly to her treasure. Though she was as anxious about Alick's minor morals as if he had been a village maiden canvassing for the *rosière*, and looked sharply after the young ladies of the place, thinking no one good enough for her boy, and that all were trying to get him, she could not see much danger here. A fat if still beautiful matron, and a lean, brown child, with big eyes and a wooden manner, had no elements of peril to alarm to her; so she welcomed the invitation — which, little flattering as it was, was a unique record in Pepita's unwritten diary—as not only promising a little change for her beloved, but also as opening the way for her own future setting to rights of what was now to her mind all to wrongs.

As her share in the transaction she repeated her request for Leam to come to her garden-party the day after to-morrow, and she wisely ignored the matter of the mantilla.

"Would you like it, my heart?" asked Pepita.

Leam fastened her serious eyes on her mother's face. By the look of her it would seem as if she had been asked to fix the date of her execution. "Not without you, mamma," she said.

"Oh yes, Miss Dundas—señorita," correcting himself—"do come, please," cried Alick. "I will show you so many things to interest you if you will — feathers and eggs and mosses and ferns: do come."

"My little Leama, say, would you like it?" her mother asked again with unwonted softness.

Leam looked at Alick. The prayer of his heart, stamped like a printed word on his honest clumsy face, touched her with the first sensation of womanly power. It was a new expression that shot like living light from her splendid eyes —a new turn in the pose of her small proud head and in the action of her hand, flirting her fan as only a Spaniard can—as she answered, still looking superbly at Alick, but speaking to her mother, "Yes, mamma, let us go. But you too," she added anxiously, touching her gown with a clinging gesture.

The new look of womanly power faded away as rapidly as it had come, and she was once more only the shy, half-frightened little girl, holding to her mother's hand with a tenacity of love almost beyond nature.

"We will come," said Pepita royally; and even Sarah Corfield, for all her martinet temper and mistress air, had to receive her acceptance as condescension.

"Now, Mrs. Dundas, shall I take you home?" said her husband in a peevish tone.

His pleasant afternoon had been destroyed, and he was angry with all the world, but chief of all with Pepita—with whom should a man be angry if not with his wife?—and as his day was broken pitilessly, he might as well leave the fragments without more delay.

It had promised so well in the beginning, and had ended so ill! He had been told off to arrange a cabinet of geological specimens for madame. They were all in confusion now as to stratification and era, but each was carefully labeled, and she had written out the list —from memory she told him—as to the order in which they ought to be arranged. They were specimens she had collected

with her husband, she said, and each fragment represented some sweet day and hour of the dear past.

It was odd that she had at the moment in her pocket the bill of a local geologist for a beginner's cabinet—not paid.

"English dog, I will not be taken by you at all, nor will I go till I like," answered Pepita in Spanish.

"Ah, señora!" said suave Madame de Montfort, "I hear by your voice that you are assenting to your husband's request in your pretty Spanish way—that grand old Castilian tongue. I am so sorry you must go!"

"But I am not going," said Pepita, by no means suavely.

"No? Then I am glad," answered madame in just the same tone of voice and with the same placid smile. "Let me put you into this easy-chair, with these cushions and footstool, and make you comfortable. Unfortunately, I am obliged to go to dear Mrs. Birkett's, but that is no reason why you and la señorita should not stay here as long as you like."

"You talk like a foolish woman," said Pepita roughly. "Do you think there is any pleasure to me in staring at your ugly sea-sick paper? If you are not here to talk to me of Spain, why should I care to stay? Come, little one, let us go. Brigand," to her husband, always in Spanish, "am I to wait here all the day for you? Will you never leave off showing those wolf's teeth of yours in your idiotic laughs? You take care never to laugh at home."

"Do men laugh who live in hell?" returned Mr. Dundas bitterly.

"If you were a good son you would appreciate better the home of your father and of all your generation," retorted Pepita with a scornful laugh. "Come, my angel," to Leam. "If it were not for thee, heart of my heart, my life would be one long eternal night."

"And mine without you, mamma," said Leam in a responsive voice, sweeping past her father scornfully.

"How I wish I could understand all those pretty things you say!" sighed madame.

"You must be a very foolish woman to have forgotten," replied Pepita. "To think of your having lived with our queen at El Corte, and that you have now forgotten our tongue! You are stupid."

"I know I am," replied madame sweetly, "but," making a bold shot, "your Spanish does not seem to me quite like the court language I was accustomed to hear. Perhaps it is purer."

"Perhaps it is," said Pepita. Then rolling out half a dozen opprobrious epithets in *patois*, she looked up into madame's face and asked, "Do you understand that?" mockingly.

"No," said madame. "Have I lost much?"

"Your face is a looking-glass," replied Pepita with an insolent gesture as she passed through the doorway.

CHAPTER XI.

AMONG PITFALLS.

It was a fine day for the garden-party at Steel's Corner, and all North Aston was there. This "all" meant no such multitudinous gathering at its fullest, not even when, as now, "company" was staying both with the Fairbairns and the Corfields themselves, and Frank Harrowby, the local eupatrid of the second degree, was at the Hill.

But people who are accustomed to small measures are satisfied with modest magnitude; and Mrs. Corfield was assumed to have achieved a success in that she had a learned professor who cared for nothing on earth but Greek and German, his wife who lived only to perfect her *hortus siccus*, and his daughter, who was pretty though advanced, eloquent on the rights of women and the iniquities of men, and who discussed without blushing the details of doubtful subjects which her grandmother at sixty scarcely understood and never mentioned above her breath. In addition to these were three young Oxonians from the Limes to brighten up the girls and make the young men of the place uneasy; and to crown all there came in due course Pepita, Leam, and Madame la Marquise de Montfort.

Mrs. Dundas, with her splendid beauty

and foreign dress, made a telling point that interested strangers, if North Astonians themselves could have spared her without lamentation. They knew her, and knowledge had conquered interest and created in its place disgust. But Leam was an acquisition, in that she too wore the high comb, mantilla and bright-colored square bows in her hair which were Pepita's social virtues; carried a large black fan, which she furled, unfurled, raised, lowered and used as only a Spaniard can; had superb eyes and a tragic face; was proud, taciturn and young; and thus brought with her the sentiment of novelty and something that had to be found out.

As for madame, she was always an acquisition. Between her gracious sweetness and never-ceasing anecdotes she kept her world amused; and the croquet-players wanted specially to see her at the hoops. For which cause she was held the greatest acquisition of all.

She had told the Harrowbys that before her marriage she had been one of the lady champion-players. "Of England?" asked Miss Harrowby simply, thinking that now she had driven in a peg whereon they could hang more than a mere theory whereon they could found an undeniable demonstration. For, as all the archives of croquet were carefully stowed away in the library at the Hill, they could verify her statement by making her point out the match in which she had played and the name she had then borne.

But when Maria had said, "Of England?" madame had smiled and answered softly, "No, I was not in England then;" and the peg had broken, and the demonstration collapsed, as all the rest had done.

Nevertheless, the elder two Miss Harrowbys so far believed in her that they expected her to help them with her advice to-day. They quite relied on her to coach them into better form, according to Cyril Fairbairn's vernacular, than that which they had been able to acquire from the doubtful teaching of manuals and the contradictory counsels of stray visitors, even though helped by as much devotion and hard work as would have enabled them to take honors in one of the exact sciences. If she could teach them better things than they already knew in croquet, Maria and Fanny Harrowby felt they would forgive her all they did not understand, and take her on trust for the remainder.

When they came up to her, however, shouldering their mallets and trying the run of the balls like people thoroughly in earnest, madame—looking supremely lovely in her black weeds in contrast to their light summer dresses—besought them so earnestly not to ask her to take part in the game, not even to the extent of looking on or giving advice, that they had nothing for it but to give her up to the rector and do the best they could with their own unassisted lights.

"I am so sorry you paid me the compliment of wishing for my opinion," she said sweetly; "but indeed I could not. It is too full of treasured memories, and it would open all my wounds afresh."

What could be done? It was a severe disappointment, but we all have to bear with disappointment, and is not grace best proved by trial? Croquet was a kind of secular religion to the Harrowby girls, and had its orthodox developments and its heretical. It had been a vital point with them to know on which side Madame de Montfort, lady-champion of—where?—ranged herself, and what laws ruled her in the matters of taking off and the like.

But again, as has been said, what could they do? Time would soften her present grief, as it would substitute silk for crape and rose-color for black, and then perhaps she would take up her mallet and develop her principles. Meanwhile they must content themselves with their own principles, and in spite of Adelaide's cold eyes and scornful smile and Frank's rather cruel "chaff" allow madame to escape her ordeal and beat a retreat beneath the lime trees with the faithful rector as her body-guard.

Mr. Dundas was in the set, and for the first time in his life blasphemed Cashiobury.

"She knows no more of croquet than

she does of Spain," whispered Adelaide to Frank; and Frank nodded back as his answer, "But she is too clever to be caught. My opinion is, that she is the cleverest woman out."

"And the worst," replied Adelaide viciously.

"Hardly," said Frank. "I have known a few that I think could give her long odds in wickedness and beat her."

"Impossible!" cried the rector's daughter, just as madame, by the rector's side, turned into the lime-tree walk and considered what it would be best to say.

"I am afraid I disappointed those dear Harrowby girls, but I really could not help it. With the best will in the world I could not nerve myself," she began tremulously. "Perhaps, indeed, I ought not to have come to such a festive scene?" she added, looking up into her clerical companion's handsome face with a touching air of self-reproach—a penitent dutifully waiting on spiritual condemnation or absolution as might be accorded.

"Oh, those silly girls can wait," said the rector hastily. "And as for your coming here, what impropriety can there be in joining a friendly little meeting like this? If we were a large community, numbering many strangers among us, it would be different, but we are almost like one family."

"A family ruled over by a very efficient and delightful head—a head that makes one understand pastoral times," said madame prettily, as if the new thought of the rector's pleasant chieftainship had diverted her mind from grief to gratitude.

The military-looking pastor smiled down on her with an air of fatherly affection and official satisfaction commingled. He overlooked the little slip between "pastoral" and "patriarchal," and accepted the spirit of her praise as it was intended. In years gone by he might have preferred to have been told that he had missed his vocation and spoilt a good general to make an unappreciated parson—that he was a pearl of price degraded from its fit setting in a conqueror's crown to be cast before a handful of clod-born swine who knew nothing of its value, and would have been better contented with husks and draff. Now he recognized that the clerical profession had its advantages, and that to be the appointed shepherd of such a ewe-lamb as Madame la Marquise de Montfort was a function not to be despised in a man's estimate of treasures. Still, he would not allow himself to be puffed up even by her delicious praise,

"Perhaps my headship is not always appreciated," he answered with a melancholy air. "Families are self-willed at times, and mine is no exception to the rule."

"It would be only through the greatest ignorance if your rule was not approved of, dear Mr. Birkett," she returned. "Where would the poor be?—where indeed should we all be?" she cried in a fine acknowledgment of equality with sinners.

"As for the poor, I do my best for them, I admit; but it is uphill work, dear madame—has been all my life," he answered with a sigh.

Had he consecrated himself to the task of winning souls like some old monk vowed to renunciation of the soft things of life from youth upward, instead of taking all the pleasures of the flesh as he took his twenty-seven port, with decorous generosity like a gentleman, he could not have sighed with a deeper expression of unrewarded effort. No one would have thought how easily he had taken his hill, how comfortably he had slept in the arbors by the way, and how little strain that pack of dull bucolic souls, which it was his business to drag up to celestial heights at the cost of three pounds apiece, had been on his clerical shoulders. Perhaps he did not know it himself. The fancy plays strange tricks with the intellect, and more men are self-deceivers than conscious hypocrites—save, indeed, when they have to conceal their family skeletons, and then terror conquers truth, and the hypocrisy which locks the door is held superior to the candor which would open it.

"That is what my dear father used to say," replied madame sympathetically. "He was almost broken-hearted at the

ingratitude of his people—he who tried so much to do them good."

"I should think an American clergyman's life must be a trying one," returned the rector, to whom, as to most men of his stamp and calibre, America is the unclean thing whence nothing good can come.

"Very," said madame.

"Where was your father's church?" he inquired.

"New York," replied madame, plunging boldly into the safety of the vast.

"Tell me now: the organization of the Episcopal Church, is it the same in America as it is here?" the rector asked, sitting down on a garden-seat beneath the limes, glad of the opportunity of learning a little about a subject of which he was entirely ignorant.

Being of the military order of mind, this handsome shepherd of souls, with his contempt for knowledge beyond and below his own in about equal proportions, was undeniably ignorant, and that on more subjects than the organization of the Episcopal Church in America.

"Precisely the same," answered madame.

"But paid by pew-rents, I suppose?"

"No," said madame, remembering how her real, not phantasmal, father—the veterinary surgeon, not the New York divine—had growled over his allotted portion in the commutation which had set the whole parish by the ears—also of the family pews, like cattle-pens, that had gone free with the houses. Knowing no other system, she could devise no other answer, but she was becoming unpleasantly conscious of pitfalls and ploughshares about.

The rector, however, saw nothing. "Where is the charge laid, then?" he asked. "They have no tithes, have they? How is it managed?"

"I can scarcely tell you all these minute particulars," said madame: "I was so very young when we left America."

"Did your father die, that you left so young?" continued Mr. Birkett, in no wise aware that by his friendly questionings he was inflicting mild torture on his favorite companion.

"Yes," sighed madame; "and," with a piteous look in her crumpled eyebrows and appealing eyes, "so painfully that I do not care to think of it: indeed, I cannot."

"We will talk no more of it, then," said the rector kindly: "we will speak of something pleasant. Tell me of your travels. What a strangely geographical life you have led! I envy you." It was the best thing of which he could think by way of diversion.

"Yes, I have been about a good deal," replied madame, taking his meaning at a venture, looking up the garden to the croquet-ground with a desire she dared not show that some one would come down to her and release her from the clutches of her unconscious Torquemada.

"France, Spain, England, America—you are a traveler—a cosmopolite such as one does not often see. And to think of your settling down in such a tranquil little nest as North Aston!"

"It is odd, is it not?" she said. "That was through you and dear Mrs. Birkett," with a look of filial gratitude. Then, with a pretty playful raising of her small black-gloved hand, she added, "If any harm comes of it, I will lay it all on your heads."

"And I will take that very remote chance for the sake of the pleasure we have already had, and I hope shall have for many years," returned the rector gallantly. "Some day I will get you to tell me the whole roll-call of your adventures in their fitting sequence."

"Yes, some day I will," said madame, looking at him steadily.

"But one thing has always puzzled me," said the rector, crossing his legs and taking an attitude of reflection. "How is it that you, who are the daughter of a Protestant American clergyman, knew the queen of Spain so well and married a French nobleman?"

"That is soon told," answered madame with a soft, superior smile. "Mamma was a Roman Catholic, and Spanish by her mother's side. She was a great deal at court, and knew Madame de Montijo, the poor dear empress's mamma. Monsieur le Marquis was a friend

of the empress's, and brought letters to Her Most Gracious Majesty and my mamma; and it ended as you see," lifting both her hands. "All these wonders are nothings when we come close to them," she added.

"Ah, that was how you came to visit Spain?" cried the rector, with the look of a man who has struck the lost trail.

"Yes. When papa died we left America: we went to Aranjuez by the queen's invitation, and lived there with mamma's old household, her old servants. And oh, by the bye, Mr. Birkett, that reminds me," then cried madame with a kind of start, breaking away suddenly into a new country, "Wigley is talking of leaving me. That is the difficulty of a small place like this, is it not, when one has found the right kind of person, then for them to go? Can you recommend me a nice steady man? I am glad I remembered to ask you. Speaking of dear mamma's old servants put it into my head. You must excuse my abruptness."

"I am sorry Wigley is leaving you," said the rector after a pause. He was disturbed at this sudden shifting of the scene, for he was really interested in Madame de Montfort and desirous of knowing her true history. Not that he suspected he had heard what was not true, but he wanted fuller details and exacter dates —from friendship rather than curiosity.

"Should I do well to speak to him and ask him to stay?" said madame. "I would not do it without consulting you, my father confessor," pleasantly.

"Shall I speak to him for you?" asked the rector, with a magnanimous overcoming of his annoyance. Who would not with such a sweet face, full of the subtle flattery of respect, that most penetrating and seductive of all modes of adulation, looking so tenderly into his?

"Thank you: how kind you are! Yes, do, please. But perhaps," she added after a moment's reflection, "I had better speak to him myself, for"—smiling— "I heard of his intention to leave only in a kind of confidence from my nurse, and Wigley must not know that I know it. I had forgotten that when I spoke to you; so perhaps I had better sound him myself, and see how I can get it from him voluntary. We never know how these people will meet us. They hang together so closely, and seem to look on all of us as their enemies."

"Too true," said the rector, who had not stared at the grammatical slip. "And in that case you will do it best. Neither Wigley nor any man, to be called a man, can deny what you choose to demand," he added gallantly. "Service at Madame de Montfort's is an honor in itself, to be well counted in the wages."

"You will make me vain," said madame, looking down.

"Then I should mark you with your first fault," answered Mr. Birkett.

An honest gentleman if but a wooden-headed one, a good husband and moderately upright in all his dealings, this fair-faced daughter of a hypothetical father, this sorrowing widow of Simon de Montfort's descendant, had cast a glamour about him wherein he neither saw nor heard things as they were. He would have taken any doubt of madame's absolute veracity as a personal insult, and of all her new-found friends he was perhaps the most staunch, if others, and notably Sebastian Dundas, run him hard.

Looking up the garden to the croquet-ground, Frank Harrowby's jaunty, dapper figure came prominently before them.

"Do you know much of young Mr. Harrowby?" asked madame suddenly.

"Frank? Oh yes! I have known him all his life pretty well. Why do you ask?" was the rector's reply.

"Do you like him?" she asked again.

"Like Frank Harrowby? Yes, well enough. He is a good boy on the whole —was a very nice boy before he went to London, but, between ourselves, he has grown conceited enough for a dozen of late years. Still, he is a good fellow in the main."

"I don't like him," madame said shortly.

"No? Why not?"

"He is abominably untruthful, and leads a frightfully immoral life in London. Don't ask me more, nor how I know this; but I do know it."

Madame said this with a little more

energy than she generally used in speaking. Had it been any other than herself, Mr. Birkett might have even said her energy was spiteful.

"I am very, very sorry to hear all this," said the rector in a severe tone. "So bad as that?"

"I would not believe him on his oath," repeated madame.

"Dear! dear! how grievous! He did not tell us that he knew you," said Mr. Birkett, meaning to imply that this reticence on the part of Frank had an ugly look with it, and so far confirmed madame's accusation.

"No, he does not know me," she answered. "It is only me who happens to know him. He was implicated in a matter in which, unfortunately, I was so far connected as to be the receiver of the poor girl's confidence. He is a wretch," indignantly, "not fit to be spoken to by gentlemen and ladies. Oh these men!" she continued with strange bitterness. "I know something of them. So meek and virtuous and mealy-mouthed at home, and the lives they lead in London and Madrid! But don't betray me about Mr. Francis Harrowby," she said anxiously.

"Surely not, but I am sorry to hear so bad an account of the young scoundrel," answered the rector with the virtuous indignation common to sinners in the sere and yellow leaf when judging the follies of youth.

"He is very bad, there is no doubt of that," returned madame; "but I may depend on your discretion?"

"My word has been passed," said the rector a trifle stiffly. "Will you give me more particulars, for you can depend on me?"

"No, dear Mr. Birkett, I will not do that," madame responded gently. "My word too has been passed to hold these confidences sacred; and not even to you, dear friend and pastor, could I commit the dishonor of betraying confidence."

"You are right, but I think I ought to know," said the rector. "Remember, I have a daughter, madame."

"So you have, but your curiosity must not be satisfied at the expense of my promise, and your faith in me must carry you over the stile," said madame playfully. "And now I must go and speak to that dreadful Mrs. Dundas. I see no one talking to her, and she likes attention."

On which she rose and carried off the rector to where Pepita was standing in the full glare of the sun, watching her husband with a threatening face while shading her eyes with her fan; Leam, clinging to her arm, also shading her eyes with her fan.

Madame had accomplished her intention—shot her bolt first before Frank had fired his, cut the ground from under his feet and thrown up her defence-works, which also were her batteries; and now she had to escape from Mr. Birkett, whose cross-questionings were becoming tiresome. Not that she intended to exchange his probe for Pepita's pestle. She knew better than this how to arrange her difficulties, else she would not have been where she was to-day, the accepted equal of the moral and exclusive North Astonians.

When Pepita saw her coming she moved her voluminous person in her turn to another uncomfortable-looking garden-seat not under the shade of trees.

"Come and sit by me," she said, with a jerk of her closed fan. "You and I are not English: we can talk."

"Willingly," answered madame with her usual bland smile and complying sweetness of manner, but by one of those incomparable conversational glissades of hers she slipped the rector from her own hands on to the Spaniard's, and in an instant was in the thick of a discussion between Mrs. Birkett and Mrs. Fairbairn on the management of children and the diseases of infants before either knew that she had turned.

But even here things did not go smoothly, for Mrs. Fairbairn advocated hardening, and Mrs. Birkett was all for care; but when the one called the system of the other neglect, that other sent back the retort word, "coddling." So madame, to whom both appealed, was hard put to it not to take part with either while seeming to agree with both; and to make each feel that she sided really with her,

but out of respect for the greater experience of that other forbore more open demonstration, taxed even her powers of suggestion, considerable as they were. She succeeded however, this being the kind of thing in which she was specially great. It was the secret of her success. And when she had turned the conversation, which threatened to become a little warmer than was necessary, into the best method of growing peaches in pots, to give Mrs. Fairbairn an occasion for lawgiving—and how she should most successfully mount a handworked screen, as one of the questions on which Mrs. Birkett was entitled to be heard—she had not only put both these ladies in good-humor again, but had impressed each with the belief that she held her views of life from beginning to end, though policy and respect together forbade her to testify openly.

CHAPTER XII.

STRUCK DOWN.

PRESENTLY the croquet-party broke up: the game was at an end, and the players melted into the talkers. By the power of attraction, consciously or unconsciously excited by Madame de Montfort, the gentlemen gravitated to her as of course, and that man was the happiest who was enabled to pay her the most flattering attention. Yet the girls there were pretty enough to have found admirers on their own merits. Carry Fairbairn, with her curly head and frank blue eyes, round, a trifle rustic, but wholesome and unspoilt; her sister Susy, darker and more piquant—the one the wild rose, the other the damask; Adelaide Birkett, with her delicate features and soft fair hair, perhaps too cold and statuesque for some tastes, but of a high-bred type and undeniably graceful if not always gracious; Leam Dundas, like a Tragic Muse with her sad proud mouth and creamy skin, her face full of unfathomed depths, her magnificent eyes eloquent of unawakened power, a creature to bewilder men with visions of the riper future when she should have come to the full splendor of her possibilities; and even Josephine Harrowby, though thirty and freckled, pretty too with her English sweetness of face, soft and affectionate, her changing color and tender eyes telling of the wifely love and womanly submission she would give had she but the chance. Yes, they were fair and sweet enough, but Madame la Marquise de Montfort, the widow of unknown antecedents, distanced them all, and no other woman, young or mature, married or single, lovely or learned, had a chance when she was by. And it would have been the same in a more varied society than that which had gathered on the lawn at Steel's Corner to-day.

She was the type of woman in whom most men take supreme delight. Comely by Nature and skillfully improved by art, her beauty was not of that turbulent kind which distracts as much as it charms, but restful, pleasant, soothing, neither stirring the senses nor disordering the imagination—sweet, gracious, womanly, and nothing more. She had a low, smooth, level voice, a quiet but uniformly cordial manner, and a flood of pleasant talk that amused without taxing her hearers' powers of mind to follow or surpass. Indeed, she did not tax their energies in any way—made no demands on them, and had no high standard, personal, intellectual or moral, which excited or strained them. She was always even-tempered, peaceable, sympathetic—was never in hysterics, and knew as little of heroics. Her views of life were bounded by the optimist doctrine of whatever is is right, by which she was saved a world of useless trouble and spiritual contention; her theology was the theology which accepts and does not question, though it should include the doctrine of two and two making five, and the part being greater than the whole; her philosophy began and ended in the one axiom that extremes meet and are dangerous; and her sociology did not range beyond the two fundamental principles—there must be poor people and rich people, and the sole rights to which women ought to lay claim are the rights to be worshiped and worked for. But by women she meant ladies or their imitators.

Cottagers and servants, all these wretched creatures, must work for themselves, of course. They came into the division of class, and were not included in the plan.

In short, she was a delightful companion for the superior creature in his moments of relaxation—just high enough to interest, and not so high as to fatigue; and in these two words lay the secret of her charm.

Presently the close-set group began to disintegrate. A new game was made up, Mr. Dundas and Alick Corfield both declining; and soon madame and Mr. Dundas found themselves as if by chance alone under the lime trees where madame had been with the rector half an hour ago, their faces turned to the wilderness by the river-side.

A steep path, made difficult by a network of tree-roots and projecting rocks, led to an arbor facing the river and the valley. It was a beautiful point of view, and a favorite show-place for the few visitors who might drop down the stream to the old castle on the heights beyond. Madame had not seen it yet, and Mr. Dundas had more reasons than one for wishing to show her the view and sit for a while in the safe seclusion of the arbor. So he carried her on, she apparently so engrossed in the conversation that she did not see they had left the lime-tree walk and were drifting into the wood.

They were talking of the influence of women over men, and the means the former ought to adopt to secure the good-humor and satisfaction of the latter. They forgot to reverse the medal, and to say anything about the means which men ought to adopt to secure the happiness of women. That was a view of the subject which madame was too politic, Sebastian Dundas too ill-mated, to take.

If madame did not know where she was drifting, Pepita did. Sitting there on the lawn, her large eyes blinking sleepily in the sunlight, but seeing everything and suspecting more than she saw, she watched her husband and madame pass from the terrace to the wood, from publicity and so far security, to secresy and no one could say what besides. She knew the walk they were on. In years gone by she had allowed herself to be taken there as a visitor who would be interested in the view, but she had never gone again. Her remembrance of the tree-roots was as if the ground had been covered with petrified serpents—of the rocks as if they had been hiding-places for banditti. To this hour she shuddered at the unwholesome wildness which had terrified her so desperately at the time, and imagination had heightened its horrors. She remembered the little arbor and the pleasant refuge it was, as her husband, then her lover, had whispered to her, for those seeking "solitude for two."

She had turned her shoulder to him coldly when he had said this, imagining herself there with big brown José, in his gala-dress, home from some journey where he had been seeing the wonders of the great world, and whence he had brought her a simple little trinket that she prized more than all the costly presents her husband had given her, since she found he had deceived her. And then she remembered her quick flash of recurrent disdain. This cold and sunless hole a love-place for a Spaniard? Her bitter laugh as she contrasted the fiery heat of her own skies with this tepid air and pale gray heaven—big brown José, strong and lusty, with this white-faced travesty of Saint Sebastian—had startled both her husband and the Corfields; and she would not tell them why she had laughed, nor what her thoughts had been.

But the arbor that she disdained even in imagination for a Spaniard's love-place would be good enough for these false English reptiles. She must follow them and hear what they said. The network of petrified serpents, the opposing rocks, she must encounter them all. And she must take Leam with her. This daughter, who was to be her second self, and some day perhaps her avenger, must know all that she knew, and be able to hate from knowledge, not only sympathy.

Suddenly it was borne in on her that

"PEPITA STOLE TO THE ARBOR."

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she had been tricked; that it had been the passionate vitality of her own desires which had given life to madame's colorless revelations; that she had been told nothing about Spain because the pretended friend of the queen had nothing to tell; and that the whole thing, El Corte, Aranjuez, Andalusia, all was a cheat, if not wholly a sham. What Mrs. Harrowby vaguely felt through her intelligence Pepita divined by instinct. Had she been required she could not have given a reason for the new faith that was in her, but she was sure all the same.

There was no more sleepy blinking in the sunlight now for her, no more quiet sitting while Mrs. Corfield and Alick tried to draw Leam away from her side on the plea of showing her the butterflies which the latter had collected, but with the secret intention on the part of the former to lecture her on her dress and to advise her on her manners. Rising abruptly, she drew Leam's hand within her arm and looked furiously at Alick and his mother. "Your voices distract me," she cried roughly. "You are foolish people, hissing there like geese. Do you think I would trust my daughter out of my sight with a bad young man and his intriguing mother? Go: you fatigue yourselves for nothing, and you fatigue me. Come, my heart, let us get rid of these creatures and be alone with each other."

And on this the two moved away together, leaving Alick and his mother disconcerted and amazed.

"The only charitable thing to say of her is that she is mad," said Mrs. Corfield briskly as she looked after the young lithe figure gliding over the grass by the side of the large fat woman, whom yet her exceeding stoutness had not robbed of her native undulating Andalusian grace, and wondered if Leam, so lean and slender now, would ever be as stout as her mother; while Alick, looking after her too, wondered only if ever in the future he should come to be to Leam Dundas as a brother and a friend.

"Leama," said her mother as they passed into the shadow of the lime trees, and were out of hearing of the rest, "I want you to come with me on the traces of that false fiend, that accursed woman, who has just gone by with your father. I will listen to what they say, and find out more than they think for. The saints have put it into my head, and I will tie a rope round her lying throat."

"Yes, mamma," said Leam trembling.

How wild her mother looked! Flushed, quivering, her eyes bloodshot, her nostrils red and distended, her whole face breathing fire, her manner fierce, she terrified the child, who yet was used to her outbreaks. And then this dark, dank shrubbery-walk, where the sun never penetrated, and which seemed as if it led to the Valley of the Shadow where sinful souls congregate and are tormented, how terrible it all was! How she wished that time would flow, but the days not change, and that she could go back to the undisturbed life of what seemed like so many years ago, when her mother slept after her fat gazpacho, and she played with her dolls in silence at her feet, and knew no desire beyond! And now all was at an end, with the foreshadowing of still greater changes sweeping on. But she obeyed, as was her wont, and the two walked stealthily along the path until they came to the back of the arbor where Madame de Montfort and Sebastian Dundas were sitting, talking in low voices together.

Thrusting Leam a little apart, and laying her finger on her lips in token of silence, Pepita stole to the arbor, bending her ear against a crevice just as Mr. Dundas was saying in a tender voice, "May I?" and madame answered gently, "Yes."

The listening woman clenched her hands and set her small square teeth like a trap. Was it then as she suspected? Had these reptiles gone so far on the bad way as this? Had that painted cheat dared to pick up the love she had discarded? and had her husband reckoned so far without his host as to imagine she would tamely submit to his finding in another woman the sympathy and affection he could not find in her? Pepita held her breath, but registered her

vow all the same, and her square teeth set themselves more firmly, while her nails dug sharply into her palms.

Then said Mr. Dundas in a soft, almost cooing voice, "It is the greatest proof of friendship we can give each other, dearest madame—you to graciously allow me to remonstrate, I to venture to find fault—but I have long had it at heart to say it to you. You so good, so pure, so superior, how is it that you can speak of the Spanish queen as you do? It pains me to hear her name pass your lips, so degraded as she is. Bad as all the Spanish women are"—and he said "all" emphatically, including by intention the woman who was the mother of his child —"she is perhaps the worst. Yet you praise her—you, the very opposite of her in everything—you, one of the noblest, she, one of the most ignoble of your sex!"

"Do you not see why, dear friend?" returned madame with touching gentleness. "Your unhappy wife is so fierce, so excitable, we must find some means of keeping her in good-humor, as we keep a child quiet with bonbons." ("Brigand!" breathed Pepita, her ear against the woodwork.) "I feel as you do about the odious Spanish queen — that she is an infamy, a horror; but what can I do? It is a deception if you will, but a harmless one; and you know what your wife is when she is not amused."

"Yes, I know too well," answered Mr. Dundas bitterly. "I have not lived with her for fifteen years not to know the galling pains of her hateful yoke."

"Poor fellow!" said madame sympathetically. "I should not think there were many soft places."

"Oh, the false traitor! the snake! the Judas! She shall pay for this!" said the Spaniard under her breath.

"If I can find any other plaything for her I will," continued madame with an unmistakable accent of contempt. "But you see how she haunts me—never a day free from her," with a sigh.

"You are an angel of goodness to suffer it," cried Mr. Dundas.

"Dog!" muttered Pepita, with a vision of her revenge at home.

"It is for your sake," said madame softly; and Pepita knew that her husband took her rival's hand and kissed it for his answer.

"And coming as she does, haunting me every day, every day, I must prevent those violent outbreaks for which she is famous," continued madame. "I could not allow her to use in my house such language as I hear she is in the habit of using elsewhere. I should have to take very decided measures if she did; and though nothing of this kind would touch *our* friendship, still, I would rather not have it to do. So—don't you see?—it is simply to avoid the chance of anything unpleasant that I have fooled her about this wretched woman, this Isabella of Spain, whom I despise as much as you do."

"I understand you, dear friend, and I honor you," said Mr. Dundas; "but if you could find some other theme how glad I should be! This one is so intensely distasteful to me. I feel aggrieved even that you should have met your husband at that court."

Madame smiled. She did not say that this too was an invention to please Mrs. Dundas: she simply answered, "And I would not willingly displease you."

Mr. Dundas gave a heavy sigh. "What a fool I have been!" he almost groaned.

"Ah," said madame sympathetically, "if we could but go back on our lives!"

"I would cancel mine—all of it, all!" said Mr. Dundas, with dangerous fervor. Then, sinking his voice, he added, "All but my friendship with you, dear friend."

"And I would meet you halfway," said madame.

Pepita heard no more. A thousand voices seemed suddenly to break out in her head, mingled with the roar of waters and the clanging of brazen bells. Her brain was on fire, her heart felt like a lump of ice, her throat had closed so that she could not breathe; and then a shower of sparks, a stream of flame, seemed to flash across her eyes as with a deep groan she sunk on the ground, struck down with the apoplexy of hate and revenge.

What followed was to Leam like a

horrible dream where she was bound hand and foot and delivered over to be tortured of men and demons. She saw her father and Madame de Montfort appear suddenly from the arbor, and she felt madame attempt to draw her away from her mother, by whose senseless body she had cast herself—she resisting fiercely, striking her father's smooth-tongued friend wildly on her mouth as she curved over her like some huge black snake, Leam thought, gracefully trying to raise her from the ground. Then she saw Dr. and Mrs. Corfield standing there, and Alick too—Alick, with his ugly, tender face strangely beautified to her in this moment of dream and terror. They too came suddenly, she did not know how—as if by magic up from the earth or shot through the air.

Dr. Corfield had a small steel blade shining between his fingers. She saw him strip her mother's large, soft, olive-tinted arm, and then she found herself standing apart, facing the river, and supported by Alick, whose eyes were full of tears and who called her "dear." After which everything was a blank save the marble face of her mother, till she found herself once more at home and alone with the one love of her life, her only friend, her sole delight.

But not for long. Pepita's ill-starred life was nearly over, and her sins with her sorrows had come to an end. There was no help for her in heaven or on earth. The saints would work no miracle of healing, and science could not. She had to die; to leave the husband whom she had never loved, and who had ceased to love her; to leave her little one, her child, her sweet heart, to a father to whom she was a stranger and an enemy—to the pains and perils of this cold deceitful English life. Her Leama, her darling—she must wander through the desert as she best could, unaided: guardian there was none for her, friend there was none—no one to help her, no, not one.

It was a bitter moment for the Spaniard. Passionate and ignorant, she had been but an undesirable kind of mother for Leam, teaching the child to hate her father—teaching her, indeed, the doctrine of hate all through; setting her in opposition to her surroundings; filling her young head with false pride, ignorant prejudices, foolish fancies; stifling religion under superstition, and keeping her as untaught as useless. Still, she loved this child, this little Leama, with her whole fierce, fervid heart, and if it was not the best kind of motherliness, it was at the least the best she had to give.

It was agony to have to leave her, but the moments flew fast, and the hour when all would be over was drawing ever nearer. Her life was ebbing away, and there was no hope of salvation. She might curse the Great King whose conquest she was; say incoherently, wildly, that she would not die, she would not—blaspheme God and the saints, man and the angels; but it had to come. Hour by hour she sank lower into the depths of the grave, and hour by hour Leam's fear increased. She would have no one with her but Leam: she would not see her husband, nor let him know her condition. "We are alone in the world, you and I," she said at intervals to the child. "You are the only one who loves me, and I am the only one who loves you. Never forget me, Leama. Sweet little heart, love me always."

"I will, mamma," said Leam, not sobbing, not weeping, as another girl might, but sitting quite still, looking at her mother with her large dilated eyes dark with terror, and every now and then kissing her powerless hand.

"Do not forget me, Leama," said Pepita with a flash of her old jealous passion in her eyes.

"No, I will never forget you, mamma. I will always love you, and you only," answered Leam solemnly.

"No one but me—no other mother but me," she said again, faintly yet fiercely.

"None, mamma. But oh stay with me yourself—do not leave me!" cried the poor child, trembling.

"My heart, my little soul!" said Pepita yet more faintly, and tender now, not fierce. "Kiss me, Leama—kiss me, little daughter. Never forget me."

The girl flung herself on the bed and

clasped her slender arms about her mother's neck. Her hair fell down and covered the face and shoulders of the dying woman like a mourning veil. Her fresh lips pressed themselves against the dear face as if they would have kissed the beloved back to life by the very force of her loving passion. Pepita gave one hoarse and shuddering sigh, and Leam unconsciously kissed away her last breath.

When she unclasped her arms the play was played out, the goal reached. There was no longer a mother with her child, only an orphan watching over a figure of senseless clay—the figure of a woman whose passions were at rest, whose mistakes would be made no more, for the end had come and she was dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER THE NEW LAW.

THE death of Mrs. Dundas was the unloosing of the feminine activities of North Aston. Each lady seemed to think that Leam's conversion to English habits of life and modes of thought rested mainly in her hands, and all rushed forward like the fairies at a christening to endue her with their counsel and enrich her by their gifts of sage instruction.

But Leam was her mother's daughter, and no more plastic than that mother had been. She wrapped herself in her cloak of Spanish pride and reserve, put on her impenetrable mask of silence and reserve, and would have none of them, rejecting their sympathy as the impertinence of the inferior, and putting their counsels behind her as so many suggestions of Satan. No one saw her weep or heard her lament; and the strongest sign of feeling she gave was by getting up and walking out of the room when the ladies who came to sit and condole with her for the loss of her mother wanted to show her where that mother had been wrong—which was in everything—and where Leam must therefore repudiate the old and adopt the new.

Her reserve annoyed them. They said it showed hardness rather than affection in so young a person, and that it would have been more natural had she been fluid and expansive, had she cried and clung to them, kissed them and said her heart was breaking, and who among them would be her mother and take care of her? Had she done this each lady would have answered "I," and all would have been her devoted friends till they had quarreled with her and among themselves for sole possession and exclusive claims.

"But Leam was not natural," they said one to the other. "How should she be, when she wore a high comb and mantilla, never came to church, and spoke Spanish more fluently than English?"

To these good creatures of kind hearts and narrow brains conformity to English middle-class modes of life was the only naturalness worthy of the name, and all which was not conformity therewith was either false or wrong.

There was one thing however, which all repeated, each in her own terms, and which Leam did accept: this was, that she must not grieve too much, for that mamma was not really dead: her body only had died, while the soul, the real mamma, was in a better world, whence she could see her dear little Leam and watch over her. So Leam was not to cry; mamma was so much happier where she was than she had been on earth it would be selfish to wish her back; and it would make her unhappy if she saw her little daughter fretting for her. Besides, it was wicked to fret. It had been God's will that she should go, and Leam must be resigned and not repine.

Most of us know from early years the unreal consolations offered by orthodoxy to those who grieve for the loss of their dearest; and the familiarity of youth induces the questioning of maturity. But all this was new to Leam, and she accepted the first part of it as the absolute truth, unsoftened by spiritual explanation or modifying paraphrase. Henceforth it was the fact that ruled her life—mamma was alive in heaven and knew all that was going on at home. Thus she had another weapon of defence against innovation, and another reason why she should maintain intact that tenacious

loyalty to her mother's love and teaching which admitted no rival and as little voluntary change.

But resolve as she might, Leam's strength had gone from her, and the Philistines were upon her. The manner of life led with her mother came to an end, and her father, acting under the collective advice of the ladies, but mainly influenced by madame, took her in hand immediately after the funeral, determined on making her an English girl, body and soul, and to wipe away the past as though it had never been.

Not meaning to be harsh, yet harsh all the same, he began the war by telling her that things were changed now, and that she must acknowledge the new régime by frankly abandoning her bad habits and absurd affectations. He would have no more of them, and they must be given up.

"What bad habits? what affectations, papa?" asked Leam superbly, thinking to carry all before her as her mother had hitherto done, and she also, borne along in the maternal skirts.

"Your ridiculous dress, to begin with," said Mr. Dundas. "Your hair shall no longer be done in that absurd style, but simply and plainly, like an English lady's; and I will have no more mantillas and combs. You must wear what I have ordered to be taken to your room instead."

This was a jaunty little hat made in the current mode, and sent from London by madame's orders.

"That thing in my room? I'll not wear it!" said Leam with a disdainful gesture.

"I think you will," replied her father slowly.

It was on a Sunday morning and in the breakfast-room when this conversation, which was the initial act of the contest that had to come between them, took place—the Sunday after the funeral, on which day Mr. Dundas had decided that Leam should go to church with him, dressed as an English girl should be, and with no more of this offensive difference of nationality or religion about her.

And it may as well be said here that breakfasting with her father at all was an unwelcome novelty to the girl. During her mother's lifetime she had had her meals with her apart. They had lived on garlic and oil, gazpacho and other un-English messes, which Mr. Dundas disdained as much as Pepita disdained roast beef and plum pudding, and which they had had served up anyhow and at all hours, just when wanted. So, partly by contrariety of temper and because it annoyed Dundas, partly because of her dislike to fixed times and formal service, and in a degree because of the character of her food, Pepita had abandoned the dining-room and family meals, keeping Leam with her as her table companion; hence the child had never known what it was to eat with her father, and in her heart resented the indignity which she held to be included in the innovation.

She was leaving the room after she had delivered herself of her refusal, but her father's voice stopped her. She faced him, fixing her eyes on him steadily.

"How like her mother!" he thought, meeting her eyes full of that tragic expression which seemed wavering between tears and wrath, hysterics and Alexandrines.

"There is no use in defying me, Leam," said Mr. Dundas hastily. "You have to submit to me now; and—understand me—you *shall* submit. You shall wear the dress that has been provided for you, and you shall come to church with me to-day."

Still Leam did not speak nor remove her eyes from their steady gaze on her father's flushing face. But though she was as rigid as if cut out of stone, yet her attitude and bearing were defying and contemptuous, and irritated Mr. Dundas almost as much as his wife's coarse violence used to irritate him, while they baffled him even more.

"You shall submit," he repeated again, shifting some plates and knives noisily as a mechanical relief to his feelings.

Then said Leam in Spanish, with a certain fiery concentration more expressive than the most passionate eloquence, "Am I not mamma's daughter, papa? It is wrong to make me do what she does not like."

"It is not," answered Mr. Dundas. "Your mother was not a fit guide for

you. She was the worst you could have had, and you are to be in better hands now. And do not speak to me in that cursed jargon, Leam. You are an English girl, not a Spaniard: speak English, then, or do not speak at all. Now go and make yourself fit for church. The bells are ringing."

"Papa," cried Leam with an imploring accent, but one full of pride; "this is affronting mamma."

"Don't talk nonsense: go," returned her father angrily.

"To the heretic Protestant church in an English hat? I am a Catholic and a Spaniard," cried Leam haughtily, first crossing herself and then making her mother's favorite sign of abhorrence.

Mr. Dundas took her by the arm, somewhat too roughly. "Hear me once for all, Leam," he said in slow, distinct tones. "You are neither a Catholic nor a Spaniard: you are a Protestant and an English woman. While your mother lived I did not interfere with you: you were her child, not mine. But now that she has gone and I am responsible for you, I will have you what I wish you to be. If you will not obey me quietly you shall by force. My mind is made up, and you ought to know by now what that means. All the people here are aware of what I intend to do—bring you to church to-day, dressed like one of themselves: if you make a scene and have to be taken by force, the shame will be on your own head. Nothing shall make me waver one inch from the line I have marked down. You have the choice between the dignity of voluntary submission—if that phrase suits your inordinate pride and vanity—and the disgrace of being publicly made to submit. Take your own way. Whichever you do take will lead to the same thing in the end."

Leam, who had listened quietly enough while he spoke, now tore his hand with contemptuous anger from her arm and covered her face. It was a trial to her, greater in its way than any she had ever encountered. That her father, whom she had been taught to despise, to flout, to regard as something infinitely beneath her mother and herself, should now have her in his grasp and be able to force her into submission — what an indignity! what an insult through her to her mother! But she had the strength if also the weakness which belongs to pride, and as she became convinced that there was no help for it, and that she must submit, as her father said, she preferred the method which [illegible] the least amount of public [illegible] Alick's simple theology was defeat[illegible]p to the mark against unor- long ne[illegible] of such a bold, unusual strain. ment[illegible] could do was to look [illegible] tear[illegible] wish. But she held her proud you[illegible] head [illegible]gh as before.

"You are a good girl," said her father, more kindly than he had yet spoken.

"No," flashed Leam, "I am not good: it is you who are bad and cruel."

"Then I need not thank you? need not be pleased with you?" he returned in a half-bantering way.

"Pleased with me? *you?*" she answered, her whole heart of scorn in her voice. Shaking her fore finger backward, she added, "I am mamma's daughter. What have I to do with you, or you with me?"

"You will soon see," returned Mr. Dundas angrily. "Unfortunately for me, I am your father, and have to do with a very silly and undutiful daughter. Now go up stairs and dress, and behave, if you can, like a reasonable creature, and not like an imbecile, as I sometimes think you are. Your absurdities are as fatiguing as they are ridiculous."

"And yours fatigue me as they did mamma," said Leam as she left the room with her head still held high, but crying in her heart, "Oh, mamma, why did you leave me? Holy Virgin, why do you not protect her and me?"

Thus the first contest was got over, and that with less difficulty than Mr. Dundas had anticipated. For the sentiment underlying, that might pass for the present: what was most valuable at this moment was the fact.

Quiet, undemonstrative, as unmoved as if it had been a thing of daily habit, Leam walked by her father's side into the church, where her presence, "clothed

in her right mind," as Adelaide Birkett said, created more excitement than if she had been a princess at the very least. A supernatural creature in human attire, the Dunaston ghost itself, could not have caused a greater stir in the congregation than did this young melancholy girl as she glided noiselessly after her father up the middle aisle, like one in a dream rather than awake, but as imperturbable [illegible] the [illegible] the prescribed [illegible] owing her place in the [illegible] the offer of which she at first coldly refused, and when her father thrust it angrily into her hands, held it on her lap at the same opening, and never even feigned to read. She sat all through the service, her mournful eyes fixed on the floor, mentally repeating aves and paternosters as exorcisms against the sin in which she was engaged; for was she not taking part in the ritual of heretics, hence offending the saints and gratifying the Evil One with every prayer that was repeated, every hymn that was sung?

When Mr. Birkett mounted the pulpit-stairs with his slow and showy step, she remembered the time when her mother had hanged the cat, crying, "Preach, Birkett, preach!" and closed her ears against his sermon as if it had been a litany of witches. As the military-minded rector preached discourses of that dry kind which are just so much professional obligation worked off with the least expenditure of mental force possible, perhaps she did not lose much.

The worst of the day's ordeal was when the families congregated under the church-porch for the friendly gossip which was as much part of the Sunday service at North Aston as the Litany or the Collect for the day. Feeling, as Leam did, humiliated and ridiculous, that symbolic hat of hers the badge of her degradation and the sign of her despair, the eulogistic glances and approving words of the ladies were as so many insults to herself and her mother's memory—additional drops of the bitterness with which her cup was filled. Every one said something kind, for every one understood the meaning of her appearance there; and all wanted to make it a kind of public admission into their order, a minor office of social baptism, wherein she was to be greatly caressed and fêted, as tame elephants caress and cajole the wild ones.

But their kindest words fell dead on unresponsive Leam. When Mrs. Birkett, dear soul! said with every good intention, "Well, Leam, my dear, what did you think of our beautiful service? Did you not like it and feel it go to your heart?" Leam answered as her mother might have done, "I did not listen, and what I heard was ugly and stupid."

When Mrs. Corfield bustled up to her and grasped her slender arms in her tight little hands, saying, "I am so glad to see you here, Leam, my dear! How nice you look in that hat! You are quite a different creature now, and really as good as any of them," Leam looked at her with tragic disgust, then for the second time to-day released her arms and turned away, saying, "And I am not glad. You hurt me."

To Mrs. Fairbairn, whose fresh round face dimpled all over with smiles as she shook hands with her warmly and panted cordially, "How nice this is!" Leam answered coldly, "Why do you laugh?" and stood waiting for her answer with a serious simplicity that disconcerted the pleasant-tempered woman as she never thought she could be disconcerted by a child.

Madame said nothing. She had more tact and discrimination than the North Astonians, and understood too clearly what the girl felt to congratulate her on her sorrow. She had it at heart to tame Leam, to make her love her, to bind her fast with cords of gratitude for a sympathy she could not find elsewhere. Not being a person of fixed ideas or resolute principles, she intended to make Leam feel that she was her understanding friend, comprehending and regretting her misfortune. All the same, she chose her hats, advised Mr. Dundas to bring her to church and make her leave off

talking Spanish, and urged him to obliterate every trace of the bad past as speedily as might be, leaving the way clear for the better future which she would direct. At the present moment, however, she contented herself simply by pressing Leam's hand with that kind of secret affectionateness which is like a whisper of love between two people who are forced to keep an undemonstrative face to the world.

For which Leam was grateful, in spite of herself. It touched her in the midst of so many loud-voiced congratulations. Had she been any other than Madame de Montfort, the girl's heart would have yielded on the spot, but she thought of her mother's persistent dislike, even while she had haunted her, and her little hand lay limp in the soft grasp which said as plainly as words, "Dear child, I feel with you."

Alick too forbore to congratulate. No one was so glad as he to see his pomegranate bud take on itself the habits of an English rose; but if he was glad for himself he was grieved for her, enlightened as he was by his power of comprehension and that odd idealizing habit of mind which rounded off all he saw.

The healing and understanding spirit which speaks without words looked out from his honest eyes as he met hers, searching for a friend, and conscious now that she had found what she sought. As indifferent to appearances as to persons, the girl drew back a few steps till she came side by side with him. Then she held out her hand, her serious face lifted up to his. "You are good," she said gravely. "You do not hurt and you do not laugh. You may talk to me."

On which, turning her back abruptly to the rest, and still holding Alick's hand in hers, she walked down the churchyard swiftly, saying as she went, "Let us get away from them. Mamma hated them all, and so do I."

"Ah, but we must not hate, señorita," said Alick very gently. "It is wrong to hate, and just coming out of church, too! God himself is love," he added reverently.

"Oh no, He is not," said Leam. "God and the saints gave mamma to papa, and now they have given me to him and taken her away. No, God is not love; or at least," she added in a plaintive voice, turning to Alick with a pathetic look of injury and ill-treatment, "He does not love me, though I do not deserve it from Him. I never did Him or the saints any harm."

What could be said to such an uncompromising bit of *anthropo*morphism as this? Alick's simple theology was scarcely up to the mark against unorthodoxy of such a bold, unusual strain. All he could do was to look down on her kindly, wish that his mother would talk to her, and say in a soothing voice, "Some day, señorita, the dark things will be made clear, and you will understand why you have been afflicted."

"All the same, it is cruel," sighed Leam. "But," kindling, "I have not said my prayers since mamma died till now in that ugly church of yours. I wanted them to know that I was angry, but I did not want them to think I was *there*," contemptuously, "of my own free-will."

"Oh, señorita, will you never be got to understand the truth?" cried Alick, filled with such infinite pity and tenderness for this erring young soul he felt as if he could have turned monk for her sake if only he could have set her feet free from their misleading fetters.

"I do know the truth," said Leam proudly. "Mamma was a Catholic: she knew what was good. It is you bad heretics who are wrong."

"No, no, we are right. Oh, how I wish you could think so!" pleaded Alick.

Leam looked at him with a strange mixture of sorrow and scorn. "I am to think you right?" she said.

"Yes," he replied fervently.

"And mamma wrong?"

He was silent.

"And mamma wrong?" she repeated solemnly. "And to tell her that to her face, up there in heaven? And make her angry with me, and unhappy? No," shaking her head, "she shall never have to complain to the saints that I am different now that I need not be afraid of her,

and when she cannot beat me if I offend her. I will do what mamma likes more than ever now, because she is not here to make me. You may hold your tongues. You know nothing: mamma knew everything. You are all bad but you, and you are good, but you are stupid."

Alick made no reply; and Leam, having opened her mind so far, was not disposed to open it farther, so they walked on together in silence, and the families at their heels smiled furtively and took long jumps to conclusions.

PART IV.

CHAPTER XIV.
UNCHANGEABLE.

THE outposts of conformity carried, Leam was driven back on that inner citadel of self which cannot be taken against the will. Here she was safe. Her father might command her actions, but he could not control her mind: he could not turn the current of her thoughts, which were ever with mamma, always mamma, nor quench either her love for that one beloved, or her hate for all the rest. To her own soul she was absolute, and Sebastian was soon made to feel there was a point where his authority failed, and whence she defied him successfully.

Not quarrelsome like her mother, not tempestuous in any way, but concentrated, dry and infinitely disdainful, she was as impenetrable as Pepita had been, and as impossible to influence. Tenacious to the highest point, she was of the nature of those creatures who suffer themselves to be hacked to pieces rather than lose their hold. Her hold was her loyalty to her mother dead as when living, and her determination not to be warped in mind from the teaching she had given her, whatever her necessity of action might be.

Whether her father was pleased or displeased in nowise touched her if she felt sure that mamma would have said she was right. Twice when he drew her to him, and kissed her with a sudden burst of feeling, the girl simply stared at him with those large eyes of hers, wiped her lips vigorously, and wondered why he should. It did not seem the right kind of thing to do—anyhow, she was sure mamma would not have liked it—and a flush of mingled shame and anger shot like a flame over her pale face as she drew herself away with a look of injury and offence. He tried this special form of paternal kindness, as was said, only twice, and then he gave up the attempt. But they did not get on together the better for his rebuff.

If he asked her to walk with him, Leam, to whom exercise was as strange as kissing, would obey him truly, but with the air of a slave hounded to her labor or of a victim preparing for her sacrifice. She never talked when they were out, and she knew nothing—having the air, too, of resenting all that was told her if it was what her mamma had not known, and what she would have contradicted. She was the most uninteresting companion in the world to a man who liked to be amused with pleasant chit-chat and found no pleasure in breaking up fallow ground; and when she had gone perhaps half a mile she would suddenly stand still in the middle of the road and say, "I am tired: I will go home," no matter what his object had been, whether Lionnet and madame, or the Hill and Josephine Harrowby.

All this was very unsatisfactory, and by degrees her father's good intentions burnt themselves out, and he began to leave her to herself as in foregone times; which was just what Leam desired.

The ladies fared no better. When they came about her with their advice and exhortations she listened to them silently, stonily, her unvarying answer being, "No, I will not do that: mamma would not have liked it;" or more frequently, changing the tense, "Mamma would not like it."

What could be done with a girl with mournful eyes and an impassive manner, who looked like the Tragic Muse, and quietly put by all that was proposed for her good on the plea that her mother would have disapproved? And what can you say to a daughter who has realized the life after death so vividly that her mother dead is the same to her as her mother living, only separated from sight by the gross veil of the flesh? They knew it was not common sense to take

the thing so literally as Leam had done, but then spiritual formulas have no common sense in them when tested by the needs of every-day life; and so people find out when they meet with those uncomfortable logicians called fanatics. Respect for filial piety forbade them to tell her that this mother, the object of her faithful devotion, was little better than a savage, coarse of nature, foul of speech, and the worst enemy she could have had. Respect for the faith which has peopled heaven with souls in bliss, of whom all is said and nothing known, forbade them to ridicule her vivid realization; while that fetish of English cult, conventional propriety, urged them to teach her that she must despise all she had hitherto reverenced, forget all she had been taught, and efface the idea of the spiritual mother's identity as a leading line of conduct; that is, teach her that she must abandon filial fidelity for disloyal conformity. It was a difficult position, but as this same common sense is a mighty power in England, leading us to the hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another, none of them meant to be beaten by a child's fanaticism, and all kept up the attack, whether they were repulsed or not.

"Poor Sebastian" was more than ever the object of feminine pity, the ladies wondering what he would do with that odd girl in the end, and lamenting the dreadful mess he had made of his life all through. He used to run distractedly from house to house, asking each kind soul to help him; though, to be sure, madame was his central point, and the one to whom he always returned. But asking advice from the rest kept him on good terms with them, and gave him that thing for which he craved more than he craved for happiness—the sympathy of a small knot of women, who thought what a dear fellow he was, and who felt their own eyes grow pitiful and tender when he lifted up his blue ones, purpled and moist with sorrow.

He went to them all in turn, and all did what they could. Mrs. Birkett lent the child hideous square-stitched patterns, and set her up in wools and canvas; but though Leam despised her industry and refused to learn Berlin-work, yet, the rector's wife being gentle and sweet-tempered, as indolent people generally are, the girl did not stiffen herself against her personally. She even got to the length of once giving her hand a timid little press that meant as much as Carry Fairbairn's strongest epithet of endearment. But Leam and Adelaide were no more sympathetic than Adelaide and Pepita had been; and when the rector's pretty daughter used to lay down the law for the girl's guidance in terms as hard and fast as mountain-bases, Leam simply turned to stone under her manipulation, and often provoked Adelaide to say tartly, when discussing her at the Hill, "Well, horrible as Mrs. Dundas was, she was better than Leam. At least she was alive."

"So I suspect you will find her daughter when the time comes," one day answered Frank Harrowby. "She has not such a pair of eyes in her head as to be always asleep as she is now. I'll undertake to say she will some day startle you all."

"I am sure I hope she will do nothing wrong," said Mrs. Harrowby with a timid look.

On which Frank laughed, and said in reply, "Let us suppose it something heroic, mother. Perhaps unmask madame."

"Oh, that madame!" cried Mrs. Harrowby spitefully; "what a snake she is! Even Josephine is beginning to find her out."

Frank laughed. "True, Joseph?" he asked, reading between the lines.

Josephine blushed a little tearfully. "I don't think I like her so much as I did at first," she said as she spied Sebastian Dundas driving up the avenue, and felt sure that madame had not been at home, else he would not have come to the Hill.

Of course he was on one of his usual errands, detailing the last new impracticability of his unfortunate Leam, and beseeching Mrs. Harrowby to give him her assistance and advice.

The conclave sat in solemn council,

and the upshot of their deliberations was that Leam should be asked to go to the Hill on a visit, when the ladies would do what they could, and Josephine especially would charge herself with the difficult task of attempting her education.

It was all meant for kindness, but they could scarcely have devised a system of more torture for the girl. Mrs. Harrowby was a well-meaning woman — none more so—but she had that rigidity of age to which young people are antipathetic, and that hardness of propriety which cannot tolerate the mistakes of ignorance or the errors of excess. She would if she could have crushed all the inconvenient vitality out of youth; indeed, she regarded youth as in itself a thing slightly improper, and wondered greatly at Providence for not growing the race mature. Moreover, she was a woman who fought with windmills and lived with perpetual lions in the way; and her windmills never ceased to turn nor her lions to prowl.

When Leam went to the Hill on her visit, Mrs. Harrowby, taking her into her own room, gave her a long, well-intentioned lecture on the need of wary walking and the care she ought to take of her conduct. Her mind was full of that frank linking of hands with Alick Corfield the Sunday before last at church, and she had suddenly encountered a lion in Leam's eyes when she had seen her fix them on Frank with that earnest, unwavering look of hers, which seemed full to the very brim of some tremendous emotion. It was nothing of the kind. She was only trying to remember the English name of the stone in his scarf-pin. It was a turquoise, and she had forgotten it.

But, as Mrs. Harrowby was a very proper woman, to whom spades was a word forbidden, she clothed her exhortation in such vaguely decorous language that the girl, used to her mother's uncompromising speech, did not know what she meant. Had she told her plainly that she was not to allow young men to make love to her, Leam would first have asked innocently, "Who is there here that should?" and would then have added haughtily, "And none but a Spaniard ever shall."

As it was, Mrs. Harrowby's periphrases went round her central thought without touching it, and all the good that Leam brought away from the interview was a lesson in pronunciation, and the conviction that when her mother called Mrs. Harrowby "a proud old frog" or "a yellow old toad," as she generally did, she was justified.

This visit of Leam's to the Hill could scarcely be called a success. It was difficult to know what to do with a girl who sat absolutely idle through the day, with a melancholy face like a Grecian mask cut in stone, turning a pair of dumb, reproachful eyes from one to the other, like a dog inquiring of an enigmatic master —a girl who would not talk, and who answered any questions that might be put to her only in monosyllables; who would not read, nor work, nor play croquet, nor laugh when others laughed, nor take any part whatsoever in the home-life; who always looked on the point of bursting into tears or of pleading passionately for mercy; and who could be neither caressed nor coerced into any sign of life whatsoever. It made Mrs. Harrowby so nervous, she said, to see her like this she could not sit in the same room with her; and Maria, who was sharp-tempered, told her plainly one day that she made herself disagreeable to them all by her sullenness.

To which Leam, fixing her big eyes on the puckered face of her monitress, said coldly, "Why do you not send me away, then? I did not ask to come." Whereat Maria was very angry and scolded her severely.

Leam never understood why she was angry. She had no idea that she was offending against good manners by her straightforwardness or her stillness. She was just herself, nothing else; and her mind had not yet wakened to the necessity of making herself different from what she was by nature and habit for the sake of others. She was a Spaniard, and they were all inferior creatures—English, Protestants, pigs, in nowise her equals. All that they did and were out of her own—

or rather her mother's—groove was wrong and silly, and she despised them for their very knowledge, as your true homebred Turk despises the Giaours who dance with their own feet rather than hire slaves to dance for them. Her whole nature was encrusted with the pride and hatred taught by Pepita as a religion, and until this should be broken up no good could be done with her.

A few days settled that fact in Mrs. Harrowby's mind, and in Maria's and Fanny's, though Josephine was more hopeful, and begged for a fair trial. Frank, too, thought she might stay a little longer. He found her tragic face amusing and her earnest eyes promising. He took some trouble with her, and did his best to get up a mild flirtation that might stir the stagnant waters; but Leam did not like him. Ugly Alick Corfield was far more pleasant to her than this jaunty, dapper little man, who would talk to her when she wanted to be silent, and who never said what she cared to hear. So Frank lost his time, and when he fairly understood that fact, joined his mother in her view of the case, and advised the young person's immediate removal.

The only look of pleasure that had crossed Leam's face during the whole of this long week was when Mrs. Harrowby —quite worn out, as she told her daughters—said to her at breakfast, "Leam, I am going to take you home to-day."

Then Leam, lifting up her serious eyes, smiled faintly and said quietly, "I am glad."

"You are not very complimentary, my dear child," said the old lady with a satirical laugh.

"Nor grateful," put in Maria crossly.

"Ought I to be grateful?" asked Leam, looking from one to the other. "Why?"

"Well, we need not discuss it," Mrs. Harrowby answered with an offended air. "If you do not feel what you have said, no talking can make you."

"I feel that I am glad, and I say that I am glad," repeated Leam in her quiet, wooden way.

"You are either one of the most heartless or one of the most brainless girls I ever met with in my life," said Mrs. Harrowby. "It is perfectly dreadful to have anything to do with you."

"And you are a cross old woman," answered Leam disdainfully.

"Hold your tongue, Leam! How dare you be so impertinent to Mrs. Harrowby? I will tell your father what a naughty girl you have been," said Maria sharply, while Josephine quivered into tears, Frank laughed, Mrs. Harrowby looked injured, and Leam, not letting go her parable, said in the same stolid way as before to Maria, "And you are a cross old woman too."

Mr. Dundas was by no means rejoiced to receive his uncongenial daughter returned so quickly on his hands. He had hoped to be rid of her for a month or two at the least, but Mrs. Harrowby said she was getting no good with them, and she had better go home before things came to an explosion. Sebastian ought to have a governess for her, a staid respectable person contented with her profession—none of your flighty, novel-reading minxes with aspirations and possibilities of their own, but a middle-aged woman of responsible character and not too showy exterior—a widow and not likely to marry again, and who understood discipline and breaking in.

Meanwhile, as Josephine had taken quite a fancy to the child, she might do what she could. If Sebastian liked to send her to the Hill, say three days a week, Josephine would make her study if she could, and do her best to open her mind. She did not promise much result, she said, for Leam was decidedly odd. When they were reading to her one of Scott's novels, the girl, who at first had been interested, asked suddenly, "Is this true?" and when they said, "No, this is not true, it is a novel," she positively refused to listen to another word, saying proudly, "I did not come here to listen to lies. Mamma did not tell lies." On another occasion, when they were reading her a bit of history which they thought would be sure to suit her fastidious taste, seeing that it was true and what had really happened, she put her hands over her ears, saying, "I will not hear of those

bad men. Mamma did not tell me these bad stories."

She was such a strange child, Mrs. Harrowby said in self-justification of this unlooked-for return: there seemed to be no way whatever by which she might be touched. They could not make her happy nor fond of them, though they tried so hard to do both. However, they must not lose heart. Their only chance lay in the beneficent operation of time, when she should be older, and for the present they must content themselves with sowing seed for the future harvest.

But sowing seed is a tedious affair to amateur spiritual husbandmen. They dislike that long waiting necessary for the reaping, and want to plant the grain over-night and stack the sheaves next morning. Nevertheless, the thing had to be done. Leam's spiritual harvest was evidently one that would not be hurried, and the various husbandmen who busied themselves in the matter must learn patience and practice it, her father and the Harrowbys among the number.

CHAPTER XV.

LAYING THE LINES.

THERE was no doubt about it: since Pepita's death a secret coolness had sprung up between Madame de Montfort and Josephine Harrowby, which had not yet crystallized itself into words nor taken any palpable shape of accusation. Nevertheless, it was there, and each was conscious of the fact, if madame alone knew the cause.

When Leam went to stay at the Hill this coolness had increased, though to Mr. Dundas madame had said how glad she was of the change for the dear child: it would do her good and bring her out. All the same, she had resented the translation as a private grievance, and Josephine had resented her annoyance as unfriendly. Why should they not have Leam to stay with them if they liked? and why should madame say disagreeable little things in that smooth voice of hers which gave them such subtle power to wound? Josephine, in no wise high-spirited, was yet quietly indignant at madame's late manner, and showed that she was by not going so much as formerly to Lionnet, and by speaking little when she did go.

On her side, madame eschewed the Hill. The continued stay of Frank was reason sufficient for her shrinking from close intercourse. She had fathomed her peril there, and confessed the enmity which might be so dangerous should it ever come to open war.

But indeed Frank had other things to think of—Carry Fairbairn among the number—and madame had dropped out of his horizon. He did not care to hunt her down nor track the secret he felt sure she was defending. He was willing she should live at Northweston if she liked the dull old hole, provided she lived unostentatiously, put no silly ideas into Joseph's head, and did not borrow money of his mother.

All this played well for Mr. Dundas, who was thus able to court madame and the Harrowbys at the same time, without chance of collision or the danger of notes compared and conversations repeated. Steering among these small social rocks, self-created, was just the amusement he liked, and he played his double game and handled his contemptible little bark with wonderful tact and skill. Nevertheless, madame was his true centre. Whatever his excursions, he always returned to her.

When Mrs. Harrowby advised a governess he went off to Lionnet, "hot foot," to hear his dear friend's mind thereon. "You know so much more of the world than I do, dear madame," he said in his submissive, flattering way.

She smiled, accepting the compliment. "And, knowing it so well, I am perhaps rather more cautious than my neighbors," she said. "Caution is not necessarily suspicion," she added. "Young Mr. Harrowby is suspicious: I am not that."

"Oh, Frank is a fool!" cried Mr. Dundas, a little coarsely. "I am glad you do not like him. How should you indeed, such a conceited puppy as it is?"

"Yet you are not afraid for sweet Leam?" asked madame, with a smile. "She is more likely to be caught than me."

"Leam! Why Leam is a child and made of wood," cried her father.

"'Still waters run deep,' and her mother was a Spaniard," returned madame.

"Good heavens, madame! Why, you don't mean to say—" began Sebastian excitedly.

She laid her hand on his arm. "My good friend, I don't mean to say anything," she replied in a quiet voice: "I only wish to point out the fact that Leam is not a child—Spanish blood at fourteen is up to English blood at eighteen; that young Mr. Francis Harrowby is a most undesirable young man; that your daughter is your heiress, and that Mr. Francis wants money. This is all; but I should add, that Mrs. Harrowby, who is a shrewd old woman and knows her cards, has had Leam to the Hill, and is now taking it on herself to advise you what to do with her. There is no treason in all this," smiling. "Surely, my dear friend, it is print which those who run may read."

"I cannot think that Mrs. Harrowby has ulterior views," said Mr. Dundas, looking annoyed. To tell the truth, he thought she had ulterior views, but not touching Leam.

"Well, we will assume she has not: now let us discuss the governess scheme," said madame with perfect tranquillity. "A governess for my sweet Leam? To tell you the truth, dear Mr. Dundas, I am not fond of governesses for motherless girls."

"No? Why?" he asked.

She looked down: then she looked up. "They are often cruel to the poor little dears," she answered simply; and Mr. Dundas, whose imagination had again gone on another track, tapped his boot impatiently, his face dark with disappointment, while hers with difficulty suppressed a smile.

"It can stand over," he then said after a pause.

"Yes," answered madame, "it can stand over, as you say. There is no hurry for a decision to-day or to-morrow; and by waiting events clarify themselves."

He looked at her eagerly when she said this, but she met his eyes with the unexcited gaze characteristic of hers, and he could not read even the shadow of a thought deeper than her words. It was a truism she had uttered, that was all.

"Meantime, I might perhaps accept Josephine's offer, and in spite of that formidable Frank and the old lady's designs let Leam go to the Hill three or four times a week, till I can see my way to a better arrangement," then said Mr. Dundas in a reflective vein, hoping to pique his fair friend into some kind of demonstration.

The faintest possible tinge of color broke through the smooth outside of the well-arranged face. "Yes, you might do that," she said with perfect equanimity: "Josephine would like it."

"Do you advise it?" His tone was cold, his manner offended.

"No," said madame sweetly, "I do not advise it; unless, indeed," also with a reflective air, "you have motives."

Mr. Dundas flamed up. "What motives?" he asked, almost in the same tone as that to which Pepita had been so long accustomed, the habit of disrespect from men to women being dangerously easy to acquire, and as easy to transfer.

Madame raised her eyes with a certain serious rebuke shining in them. How pretty she was! how perfectly well-bred! How could he have spoken to her so roughly?

"Unless you intend to marry the dear girl," she said quietly. "That also would suit Mrs. Harrowby quite as well as the other; indeed, better."

"What can you be thinking of, madame?" cried Mr. Dundas, this time his severity affected. In reality, he was pleased that she had said this thing. It meant either jealousy for her own part or the confession of his attractions generally.

"Of what am I thinking? Of what Josephine is," replied the marquise with a placid smile.

"Tut! tut!" he said: "you must be dreaming, my sweet friend."

"Are you?" she returned.

He bent his head nearer to her. "Sometimes I do," he answered in a low voice.

"It is an unprofitable employment," said madame rising. "Shall I ask Mr. Birkett, who is coming up the garden, to lecture you on such waste of time?"

"How do I know it is waste of time?" answered Sebastian hurriedly. "Dreams come true sometimes."

She smiled tranquilly. "Yes, you are right, they do, but not often," she answered, moving to the door to greet her friendly pastor.

When madame's visitor left her that afternoon she went up stairs into her own room, where she first double-locked the door, then unlocked a box, whence she took a packet carefully wrapped in many covers, and labeled on the outside, "In case of my death to be given to the name inside."

One by one she came to the treasures within. These were, first, a large green velvet pocket-book, with the letters V. and E. combined in a monogram worked elaborately in gold on the cover. Beneath the monogram was a violet, also wrought in gold. The case contained about a dozen letters and notes; four photographs—one of herself, one of a young man, one of both together sitting in a friendly attitude, with their hands clasped and his arm round her shoulders, and the fourth, that of a little baby in her arms; a lock of short curling hair of a bright-brown color—a man's hair, not a woman's; some visiting-cards, not bearing the name of Madame de Montfort with a coronet at the top, as now, but plain Mrs. Harrington; and a gold locket with the same monogram, V. and E., on one side in pearls, on the other a violet in diamonds; within were the same photographs as before—in one oval the man, in the other herself.

Madame looked at all these treasures attentively, read the letters through one by one, then laid them in their order carefully, methodically, and tied them up again in their band of rose-colored ribbon. She examined the photographs, and smoothed the thick ring of bright-brown hair over her supple fingers, a certain emotion in her well-preserved face, but emotion subdued and under control—emotion that respected cosmetics, and was nowhere near to passion. Then she returned all in the same order as before, wrapped her precious pocket-book in many papers, and laid the packet at the bottom of her trunk, covered carefully with some of her reserve force of wardrobe. This done, she sat by the window meditating.

From where she sat she could see the chimneys of the Hill peering above the famous avenue of double chestnuts, lying about three miles to the right. Not more than half a mile away, near the river, was the pretty and less pretentious place which Mr. Dundas had named in his early lovetime "Andalusia Cottage," but which maps and old itineraries set down as "Ford House." She turned her eyes from one to the other, and by the look of her she might have been casting up a sum. Perhaps she was—a sum of chances, and the greater algebraic value of a commonplace kind of bird in the hand over one handsomer, better portioned, more sufficing, more desirable, in the bush—a sum of times and duration, and how long that slender stock of bank-notes in her possession would last, and when the tradesmen would demand to have their accounts settled, and fair words would be found unable to stave off rainy days; a sum of forces, and how much influence the fear of exposure would have over a man in good position, the son of a model English family respectable to its finger-tips, when he should come home and have to choose between marriage and denunciation—marriage or his secret life in London laid bare and his iniquities proclaimed to his scandalized relations; a sum of balance and comparative values—on the one side the love of a dishonored past, on the other the security of an unloving future.

The casting-up was apparently in part unsatisfactory, for she sighed once or twice, as people do who have decided for their interest against their inclination; though, to do her justice, she had not the weakness to pretend even to herself that she was a martyr because she had

elected to forego a splendid possibility for a sufficing certainty. Whatever the faults of Madame la Marquise de Montfort might be, they were not those of mental debility, and she knew nothing of that moral cowardice which calls the ugly things of the mind by noble names. At this present moment she knew quite well what she was doing, and why she was doing it. She was deciding on selling herself for rest, and on burying the flowers of truth and love with a golden spade.

Her reverie ended as the Harrowby carriage drew up at her door, this visit to madame having hung like a millstone round the neck of Mrs. Harrowby's conscience for the last three weeks or so. Indeed, her visits to Lionnet were social debts never paid willingly by the lady of the Hill, and always postponed to the last limits of decency. To-day she was accompanied by Maria and Josephine as shields to protect her when the asperities which were so sure to arrive were on hand—Maria as her buckler with a spike, Josephine as her buffer covered in velvet.

After the usual greetings, made in the graceful manner of suave superiority which was madame's way, and which always irritated Mrs. Harrowby, conscious as she was of her own place of pride as an English lady, the widow of one man of high county standing and the mother of another, while this Madame la Marquise de Montfort was a myth sprung from no one knew where, belonging to no one knew whom—an enigma whereof no one had the key, a fable with a questionable moral—madame, turning to Josephine, said blandly, "Mr. Dundas was telling me to-day, dear girl, of your generous offer to teach our poor dear Leam. It was very kind—a maternal act truly charitable and much needed."

Josephine blushed and looked confused. She wished madame had not said that word "maternal." It struck too near the secret centre of her thoughts to be pleasant, spoken out broadly like this; and she feared it might enlighten her mother, who as yet had not seen Sebastian in this offer of quasi governesshood to Leam—had not connected feeling for the father with interest in the girl.

Turning from Josephine to Mrs. Harrowby, madame continued: "And that is just what the poor child wants, is it not, Mrs. Harrowby?—a mother, such as our dear Josephine would make, to guide and direct her, and make her fit for her future position as the wife of an English gentleman—like Mr. Francis, for instance?"

"Josephine would make rather a young mother for a girl of Leam's age," retorted Mrs. Harrowby tartly.

Truly, Madame de Montfort had the most irritating effect on her. Whatever she said annoyed her, and each time they met Mrs. Harrowby mentally vowed should be the last.

Madame looked at her amiably. "I do not think Mr. Dundas considers her too young for such a post," she said with her sweetest smile.

"Madame how can you say anything so gross, so insulting?" cried Mrs. Harrowby, her pale and puckered face aflame with indignation.

She wished her daughters to marry, certainly, but she did not like their chances discussed.

"What have I said?" asked madame still amiably, a little bewilderment superadded.

"It is a most unpleasant insinuation," cried Mrs. Harrowby. "We are not used to such things at North Aston." She said this as if North Aston was some sacred city where no unclean thing was suffered to enter.

"No, no insinuation at all, dear Mrs. Harrowby," returned madame with graceful equanimity, but still holding to her point. "I have not studied life so long and under such varied experiences not to understand my alphabet. The thing is as clear as"—early habit of speech prompted "mud," reflection substituted—"daylight: if Mr. Dundas does profit by my friend Josephine's sweet offer, it means marriage and nothing else. Why," smiling at Mrs. Harrowby in a sisterly, confidential way, "you and I are too old, dear lady, not to understand that. A child could see it."

"In which case I should decidedly forbid the whole thing," Mrs. Harrowby answered, pulling irritably at her crape and looking for support to her eldest daughter, who, after the manner of eldest daughters in general, was gradually gaining the ascendency over her mind. "It shall never be said that we manœuvred for Mr. Dundas."

Madame raised her eybrows. "It would be a pity to forbid such a promising arrangement," she said. "What does it signify what people say? Why not let them marry if they like? You must give young people opportunities."

"Madame, do not, pray!" pleaded poor Josephine, nearly crying from shame and vexation.

"Don't what?" answered madame, with the look of a French *ingénue*. "Why should I not? I am only pleading your cause, dear."

"Surely, Madame de Montfort forgets to whom she is speaking," said Mrs. Harrowby with dignity.

"No, indeed," she answered with a sweet and pleasant little laugh. "I am speaking to my friend Josephine, who would make one of the best wives in the world, and who has, if I am not mistaken, a very warm place in her heart for our poor widower; while he on his side only wants a little wise encouragement to respond as a gentleman should when he wishes to reward a fidelity that is both pretty and touching."

"Wherever else you may have learnt the ways of the matchmaking world, pray do not try to give lessons here," cried Miss Harrowby angrily.

Madame raised her eyebrows for the second time. They were well-marked eyebrows, many shades darker than her hair. "No?" she answered innocently. "Why do you say that? What have I said wrong?"

"I do not think one of my daughters exactly the kind of girl to fall in love with a married man, or to offer herself as you suggest," returned Mrs. Harrowby glacially. "The mere supposition is an insult."

"You forget, too, that Mr. Dundas has been our friend for life, both before and after he was married," added Maria eagerly, conscious on her own side of thoughts and wishes once harbored in her heart that would scarcely bear translation into words. But hers was an old dream, begun and cherished long before that fatal visit to Spain which had blown her castle to the ground and rasped her on the bare boards of disappointment. Josephine's was a later and more sentimental matter—a question of pity overflowing its borders and passing into the regions akin.

"No, indeed, I do not forget your old friendship," madame replied with a certain meaning accent. "That is just why I thought a marriage between Mr. Dundas and my dear Josephine would be so pleasant, so suitable."

"Don't, don't, madame!" again murmured Josephine.

"Madame, one word for all: I cannot allow this subject to be discussed," said Mrs. Harrowby with all her stiffest dignity, her iciest displeasure. "If I thought that you had the smallest ground for your assertion I would forbid Mr. Dundas my house."

"Mamma!" this time pleaded poor Josephine, set between two fires and scorched cruelly at both.

"Surely!" remonstrated madame, representing worldly wisdom.

"Mamma would do quite right. Indeed, she could do nothing else," said Miss Harrowby.

Madame looked from one to the other with perplexed amazement perfectly translated. "I am sorry I made any remark," she said slowly. "I fear I have done harm."

"You have done good," retorted Mrs. Harrowby, still dignified and icy. "It is always useful to know what others think, and to be on one's guard against vulgar mistakes and spiteful misrepresentations."

Madame slightly shrugged her shoulders. Her dear friends were terribly unreasonable, and she wished them to understand that she thought them so. Husbands were evidently not too plentiful in North Aston: why, then, starve a promising plant, nip in the bud a potential

bloom? For her own part, had she been the mother of three matured and maiden daughters, she would have cultivated Mr. Dundas assiduously; and so she meant it to be inferred as she said in her smooth, inoffensive voice, "But, dear Mrs. Harrowby, it would surely be such a pleasure to you to see one of your dear girls settled comfortably, and in such a pretty house as Andalusia Cottage, too. And then Mr. Dundas is such a perfect gentleman; and if Leam, sweet child, is peculiar, she is very interesting. I think it would be just delightful."

Before Mrs. Harrowby could reply, Maria broke in: "If you are so vastly pleased with Mr. Dundas and Andalusia Cottage, madame," she said with bitterness, "why do you not take it all to yourself?"

"Ah!" said madame, turning her fine eyes on the speaker with mournful rebuke; "you are cruel, Miss Harrowby. You forget my state."

"Not so cruel as you have been to us," cried Maria.

"Are any of you widows of late date?" asked madame, still with the same mournful rebuke. "In wishing to see one of you married to the man of her evident affections, the man of her choice, I do not bring before you lost happiness. I only wish to see you enjoy that state you have never known and have so long desired?"

"How dare you say so long desired?" fired off Maria indignantly. "To hear you talk, one would think that Josephine was really in love with Mr. Dundas."

"Would you, now?" returned madame simply, with a friendly look to Josephine; "and you might make a worse guess," she added.

Upon which the three ladies rose, Mrs. Harrowby saying coldly, "As the conversation has taken such an unpleasant turn, all I can do is to end it;" and so, without shaking hands, only bowing, they stiffly conveyed themselves away, leaving madame mistress of the position in that she had done that which she had intended to do.

For the upshot of this conversation was a cool note from Mrs. Harrowby to Sebastian Dundas, withdrawing the offer which her daughter Josephine had made to help Miss Dundas in her studies, without reason assigned or regret expressed. She was angry at the necessity under which she felt of doing this—angry with madame, with Josephine, with Sebastian, with herself, with everybody concerned, and a great many who were not concerned. She would have been very glad indeed had this marriage come about by natural and pleasant means, and she had even allowed the thought to cross her mind in its deepest recesses more than once since Pepita died. But when it came to a cold, business-like calculation, a confessed act of angling as put by madame, then all the native pride of the English lady woke up in her heart, and rather than appear to be planning for her daughter's settlement, she cut the ground from under her own feet, and made the poor girl unhappy because she had not sufficient moral courage to despise insinuations and defy gossip.

On her side madame felt safe. She knew enough of Mrs. Harrowby to be quite sure that she would not give the true reason of her sudden coolness. She was not the kind of woman to confess to any gentleman that she was afraid her daughter was in love with him, and that what she had offered in apparent friendship meant in reality a bold bid for marriage. And even if she should take such a decided step so utterly out of her own line, madame knew Sebastian Dundas and the strength of the chain she had laid on his neck.

It all came about as she had designed. Mr. Dundas rushed off to her in hot haste to tell her of this unaccountable break in the harmony of his relations with the Hill. He was full of it, as a grievance demanding the universe for an audience, and he exhausted conjecture as to the cause without coming within bowshot of the truth.

Madame listened attentively, sympathetically, gave her mind to it as a story she had not known until now, and busied herself in exhausting conjecture side by side with him, also keeping out of bowshot of the truth.

At last, raising her eyes to him with that calm look for which she was famous, she said in a quiet voice, "I tell you what it is, my friend. Mrs. Harrowby sees things as I saw them, if you remember, and knows that this scheme of Josephine's making herself Leam's governess means marriage, if you accept it and it is carried out. She wants, therefore, to bring you to the point, and it is in fact a polite way of asking your intentions."

"No," said Mr. Dundas with a fatuous smile.

"Yes," said madame with a serious look.

He laughed. He was not displeased, and he was not surprised. He had been too long accustomed to air his griefs against Pepita not to know how sincere was the pity awarded to him by the ladies at the Hill. And he knew, too, that had not madame come in between, at this time he would have been preparing the ground for Josephine's future decorous installment as the mistress of his house and the sharer of his fortune. As it was, his hopes were centred here, not there, and poor Josephine's long years of faithful friendship went for nothing weighed against madame's improved fascinations.

"At all events," he said, looking at his siren tenderly, "I have no intention of asking Miss Josephine to be my wife. She is a nice good girl, and I dare say would make a man happy enough, but she is not the wife for me."

"No," said madame quietly: "I should not think she was quite up to your mark. When you marry again, you must not make a mistake a second time."

"I do not mean to do so," he answered with meaning.

To which she replied tranquilly, "I am glad of it."

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME'S UNJUST STEWARD.

MADAME DE MONTFORT'S correspondence, as a rule, was of the most meagre dimensions. She seldom wrote letters, and still more rarely received them, but for some days after these last interviews with the Harrowbys and Mr. Dundas she was busy with her pen, and both sent and received much curious literature.

Among the rest came a letter signed her "affectionate brother-in-law, Julius de Montfort," telling her that their old family lawyer and trustee, a Mr. Blanc, had proved himself a thorough rogue, and had levanted with all the De Montfort treasure, family plate, diamonds, leases, bonds, money—her own dowry and her child's portion included.

This letter, which was in good English enough, was written in a London tradesman's hand on English paper, but dated from the Hôtel de Louvre in Paris. It was stiffly worded if kindly intentioned, and one phrase, "as per advice," came with a curious twang from the hand of a French marquis. It expressed the writer's regret at being the bearer of such ill news, and feared that his poor sister-in-law would feel the blow hard, coming so soon after her great loss. But it counseled courage and industry, according to her known qualities, and advocated "governessing" as the most suitable thing for her.

"With your talents and acquirements, my dear Virginie," it said, "you cannot be long in finding some such situation. I would, if I were you, look out for some good widower with young ladies to drill and bring out. That would be more in your line, I fancy, than a parcel of young ones to teach their alfabet to."

"Alphabet" spelt with an *f* was not detected by madame as an error.

After reading this letter madame heroically anointed her eyes with some pungent ointment that caused the lids to swell and redden and brought tears in plentiful abundance; after which she wrote to Mr. Birkett, her sheet-anchor in all her storms.

It was a pretty little note, full of apologies for the liberty she was taking, but saying would her kind pastor step down to her at his earliest convenience? She had just received news that would make his presence very comforting and valuable; also dear Mrs. Birkett, if she cared to give the time. She needed advice and

assistance at this moment more than she had ever done before.

It never occurred to her to go up to the rectory for this advice and assistance. It was not her way to derange herself even for her own affairs, putting her friends under requisition being more the kind of thing to which she was accustomed. And as people can generally work their world as they set themselves to pull the strings, it was the fashion at North Aston to attend on Madame de Montfort, because she made it evident that she did not mean to attend on herself. The ladies sometimes thought her unreasonable in sending for their lords at all hours, but then women are always spiteful to each other, and the gentlemen gave no heed, but went.

"I wonder what is amiss?" said Mr. Birkett anxiously as he handed the note to his wife, a little wincing at the spelling.

"She wants money," said Adelaide with a sneer.

The thought was not quite original. She had heard Frank once say, "The touchstone will be if ever she asks for money; and, mark my words, she will ask for it."

Before madame's arrival the rector had rarely been angry with Adelaide. She had managed him with consummate skill, and had been the joy of his life, if its mistress. Now they were always at odds together, and, as Adelaide once said to Josephine, her father had never spoken a kind word to her since that odious woman came. Nevertheless, she held to the line she had taken from the first, and was for ever provoking his displeasure by her enmity to his friend.

"You are harsh and unwomanly, Adelaide," he said angrily when she suggested the pattern of madame's need, while Mrs. Birkett put in more gently, "My dear, is this quite charitable?"

"No, it is only true, and time will prove it," said Adelaide coolly; whereat her father, answering, "If you do not respect yourself, Adelaide, I must beg you to respect my friend and your mother's," turned his shoulder and ignored her for the remainder of the discussion.

"At all events, I must go down and see what the poor dear creature wants," he said fussily when his brush with Adelaide was over.

"Yes, that is only right, dear," replied Mrs. Birkett, good, easy soul. "Give her my love, poor thing! and say I am too busy to go out this morning"—she meant she was too lazy—"but tell her to send up the baby for a few hours. It may be a relief to have the little one taken off her hands to-day."

"Yes, I will, my dear," said the rector, the softened tones of his voice thanking her for her sympathy. For indeed her conduct to madame had made him love her more than he had ever loved her before; it was such a sweet contrast, he used to say, to the average Englishwoman's jealous exclusiveness, making marriage such bondage and a husband such a mere slave as she does.

"If you are going to have that odious baby here, mamma, I will go to the Hill," said Adelaide in her coldest manner, meaning her mother to give way, as once she would have done.

But Mrs. Birkett had no thought of giving way. She wanted the baby to play with, and she did not regret her daughter's absence; so she simply said, "Yes, do, dear, it will amuse you;" and her voice showed her relief. "For really," as she afterward complained to her husband, "that dear girl's temper grows worse day by day, and she makes me quite unhappy with her dislikes and her fancies. She cannot be simple and easy, and take things as they come, but is always looking for mysteries and finding faults no one else sees. As for poor dear Madame de Montfort, she hates her so unreasonably she even dislikes that sweet child because of her."

To which the rector answered in an angry tone, "She is certainly strangely prejudiced against madame. I have never seen her so unamiable before, and I cannot understand it now. But I will not allow her to treat the poor creature with rudeness. She and I will quarrel if she does."

Leaving his wife and Adelaide, however, to settle their present differences as they best could, the rector went off to

his fair friend to hear what news she had for him, and to give her his best advice thereon.

He was struck by her air as he entered. Subdued and evidently penetrated by sorrow, those red and swollen lids evidences of some severe affliction, she was yet so noble, so self-sustained, so grandly calm and gracious in her strength, it seemed to him he had never seen her so beautiful, so morally superior to the rest of womankind. She gave him the impression of some stately priestess on whom a mortal hurt has fallen, but who, remembering always that she is a priestess, one consecrated to the noble life and the manifestation of strength and grace, disdains the weak lamentation and childish outcry of meaner women.

"Something terrible has happened, my dear friend?" said the rector, holding her hand in both of his and speaking with sincere emotion.

"Yes," she said with a patient smile, "something terrible, indeed. But sit down, dear Mr. Birkett. I need not fatigue you in body as well as in mind." Here she smiled again—that sad sweet smile of hers which was more pathetic than the tears of other women. "I am sure I must have tired you by now with all my trouble and disasters."

"Not at all, not at all! Don't say that," repeated the rector. "I am so sorry that you have these heavy crosses to bear."

"This is second only to the worst of all—that terrible loss I can never get over," said madame.

"Ah! I am sorry," he said. "What is it?"

"Briefly this—I am ruined!" said madame, crossing her hands on her lap.

The rector gave a little gasp. He remembered Adelaide's words: was it possible they were true?

"Read this, my friend, and then you will know as much as I can tell you," continued madame, who had seen his momentary look of terror.

She put into his hands the letter signed Julius de Montfort, written as an English tradesman would have written it, on Bath post, but dated from Paris. "That is from my brother-in-law," she said; "and now you know all."

"Villain!" cried the rector as he read, madame's bright eyes watching him keenly the while. The sight of the letter banished his suspicions, if indeed that passing terror could be called suspicion at all: he trusted madame too loyally to imagine her capable of a planned deception. Had she asked him outright for a loan, Adelaide might have been right, but this was quite different, and this carried its own proof with it. And when he said "Villain!" so energetically, and struck the letter angrily with his hand, she drew a deep breath and uncrossed the taper fingers so closely entwined on her lap. She knew now that she was safe.

"What shall I do?" she asked, when Mr. Birkett had read the letter for the second time. "I see nothing before me but to follow my brother's advice and make myself a governess. May I come to you for a character?" with touching cheerfulness.

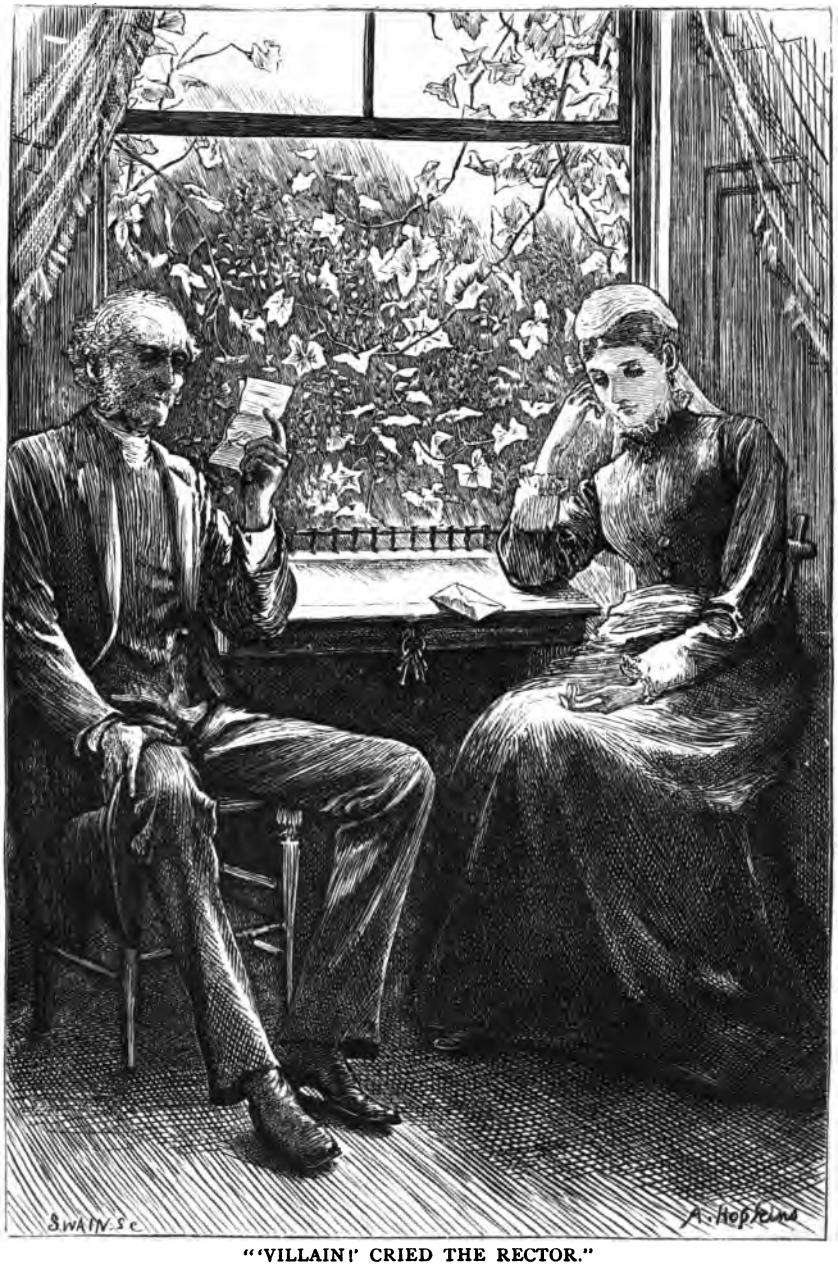
The rector could not answer for a moment. His clerical tie had suddenly become tight about his throat. "Surely," he said at last, with an effort, "if such a painful necessity exists you can command me."

"Thanks, dear friend! I knew I could count on you," replied Madame de Montfort gratefully. "But, alas! what can I do about my child? It would break my heart to be separated from her, and who will take a baby of a year old with a governess?"

"My wife would take charge of the child for a while until you had looked about you," began the rector; and then he stopped, a little doubtfully.

He did not object to the occasional presence of the baby at the rectory. It pleased his wife, and was not an exorbitant price to pay for the pleasure of madame's society. But a baby *en permanence*, and no madame at hand as compensation! He hesitated visibly, and the cordiality dropped out of his voice.

"Ah!" said madame with feeling, "you are not a mother, my friend. Do you



"'VILLAIN!' CRIED THE RECTOR."

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think I could let my sweet one go from me?—not even to such a second self as dearest Mrs. Birkett."

"The only thing will be, then, to find a situation as daily governess, where you can keep your own house," said the rector, a pang passing through him as he thought of Sebastian Dundas—the very thing for her lying at her gate.

"So I think and feel," returned madame. "But where to find this phœnix of a widower with young ladies to educate and introduce?"

She looked into his face, and he shifted his eyes uneasily. "I do not know," he said.

"Nor I," she sighed. Looking round her room, she added, "It is a pity to have to leave it all when I have made my little place so pretty."

There was a silence.

"I am a true woman," she continued softly. "I care for my house and home; and now that I have got used to my life at Lionnet, and have made such good friends here, I do not like the idea of leaving and turning out into the bare, bleak world beyond."

Her eyes were mournful, her voice full of sadness. The rector felt pushed back on his magnanimity. It cost him some effort: nevertheless, he knew that as a gentleman he must make it. Between losing her altogether, while letting her confront who knows what dangers out in the perilous world beyond, and opening a door for that fellow Dundas, his conscience forbade him to hesitate. He was a small-headed man truly, proud and pumpkin-like, but he was a gentleman; and his inherited instincts held him straight if certain other of his natural qualities would have driven him astray.

"There is Mr. Dundas," he then said a little stiffly.

Madame's tranquil face gave no sign. "Leam?" she said interrogatively.

"Yes," replied the rector.

She shook her head. "A task, I fear, beyond my strength," she answered. "I should not like to try and fail."

"You would not fail," cried the rector, as her champion against herself.

She smiled. "You are a partial judge," she answered. "You rate me too high."

"Could I?" he answered almost tenderly.

He was so grateful to her that she had not flown at his suggestion! Then she had no feeling for Sebastian? and having no feeling there was no danger.

The rector did not like contradiction. Having offered the suggestion, he stuck to it. She *must* be Leam's instructress: on all the wide face of the earth this was the only thing she could do or ought to do, and he bent the whole force of his mind and will to force her to accept his suggestion as a religious obligation. It cost him some time and trouble to make her see this matter as her duty—her duty to herself and her child, and, taking lofty ground, poor motherless, desolate Leam as well; but he gradually made way and gained on her reluctance.

She was open to conviction, as indeed she always was, being one of those fine reasonable women who allow the masculine intellect its due weight in their deliberations, and are pretty sure to show their superiority by yielding to it at last. But she yielded only slowly and by degrees. It was not the thing she wanted, she said—not what she had thought of in any way. She was afraid of the task, and she was not quite sure that Mr. Dundas would like it.

But when she said this the rector snorted like a war-horse, and answered angrily, "Not like it? Why, how could that fellow Dundas ever look for such a blessing? It is more than he deserves, a thousandfold."

Then madame threw up her hands, smiling. "I yield! I yield!" she cried. "I will see Mr. Dundas, and tell him that it is at your sanction and desire, indeed by your express suggestion, that I offer myself to him as Leam's governess, and if he thinks my doing so is a freedom, he is to talk to you about it."

To which the rector answered, "Yes, do so: it is the best way of putting it, and I am glad to be your shield and buckler in this matter."

"You have been my shield and buckler all through," said madame prettily.

"But for you I should never have been here at all."

When the rector left, bearing a message to Mr. Dundas from madame, asking him to come and see her, and intending for his own part to suggest the scheme he had just been discussing to save her the awkwardness of doing so, madame flung herself into an easy-chair and, covering her face, laughed aloud. It all seemed so droll to her, such simplicity, such blindness, such childish faith. She wondered where a man like Mr. Birkett could have packed away the worldly knowledge he must have gained in his sixty years' passage through life to be so easily deceived as he was by her.

"I always thought it," she said to herself, still laughing: "men are the vainest creatures on the face of the earth. Talk of women! The weakest of us all is not so soft as a man if taken in the right way, flattered as he likes to be flattered, and treated as something infinitely superior, not only to poor little us—that is of course—but to every other man. These two dear, stupid school-boys of mine, I govern them both with lollipops—simply flatter and cajole, and have them both at my feet. If I did not know the world and men so well, I should say I was one of the cleverest women out—and, for the matter of that, I am, pretty well—but it is not that so much as that they are the biggest fools. How easy it has all been! and my unnecessary terrors!"

On which she laughed again; but, remembering that Mr. Dundas was to be here soon, she composed her face to the proper nobly sad expression she wished it to wear, and sat waiting for his advent, knitting a baby's sock.

Had Madame de Montfort been a queen to whom Sebastian Dundas was kneeling while pleading for her grace, he could not have thrown more respect, more homage, into his words and manner than when he came now to Lionnet to beseech this unknown tenant of his to live here, in his house, rent-free, and to accept a handsome salary for teaching his daughter doubtful orthography and defective syntax. He forestalled all she wished to say. The rector had told him enough—quite as much as it was necessary he should know, he said—and now the thing must be considered settled. If one steward had proved himself unjust, others would be found faithful, and the future must atone for the past. So long as he lived, he said with tears in his eyes and an almost boyish passion of devotion in his face, she should never want a friend, and if she wished to make him happy she must put him to the test and make him of use to her.

For a moment madame felt ashamed of the pitiful cheat she was enacting. Contrasted with all this earnestness and truth, what a heartless sham she was! Not that she suffered herself to be turned from her main point by remorse or shame. She was fighting for dear life, and she meant when she had got what she wanted to make no bad use of it. On the contrary, she would be a blessing to them all—the light of his days and the tender guardian of his child. The end justified the means, and if she had to gain that end by crooked means, the fault lay with society, which will not bear the truth, not with her because she dare not tell it.

So she reasoned and sophisticated, and soon talked to sleep that starved, somnolent thing she called her conscience, and made herself believe that she was doing right, eminently right, by deceiving Sebastian Dundas to his happiness and Leam's gain, and by making the rector her stalking-horse for the sake of the respectabilities involved. She had her part to play, and she played it well. Indeed, she did most things well, clever as she was.

She accepted the tone her landlord took as the homage due to her womanhood in the first place, to her rank as Madame de Montfort in the second. She confessed her indebtedness frankly, but in a grand, almost regal manner—her very confession itself a grace—and she agreed to his terms with the quiet dignity of one who was giving honor and receiving right. She spoke of her future influence over Leam without vulgar boasting, but with no affectation of undue modesty—seriously, in a fine, almost mater-

nal spirit, as one knowing her full value and what she could do for others; and she let it be seen that she held that influence high and not overpaid at the price.

So thought Mr. Dundas, and so he said effusively; to which she answered gravely, "And perhaps you are right. There are certain things which money cannot buy or pay for."

The interview was a decided success all round. Not the faintest ray of light shot athwart the pleasant darkness in which the landlord of Lionnet was living: not the smallest slip in her perilous path betrayed the true moral whereabouts of madame. The one shut his eyes and allowed himself to be hoodwinked with a docility partly contemptible, partly touching: the other fastened on the blind with no uncertain hand, and spurned Truth as a slave behind her. The end each had in view was accomplished. Sebastian Dundas had secured the right of closer daily intercourse with madame: madame had secured her present maintenance for the one part, and her future marriage with her landlord for the other; the last falling so naturally, coming so much as of course from all that had gone before, that the place would accept it quietly, and not be stirred into an inconvenient excitement. For excitement might lead to questioning, and questioning might entail answers. Leam, at the worst, would take no harm from what it pleased Madame la Marquise de Montfort to call her views on education. If the girl was taught only how to hold her knife and fork properly, it would be so much to the good; and madame, though herself substantially uneducated, was by many degrees Leam's superior. Malice itself could not find a loophole whence to shoot its poisoned shafts, and the various parts of the puzzle fitted to perfection. But the Harrowbys and Adelaide Birkett laughed significantly when they heard of the unjust steward and the subsequent arrangement, and Josephine had red eyes for several days after.

She got a little consolation from Adelaide's merciless suggestions as to the real state and condition of this strange woman. She had neither the wit nor the courage to think sharp things of herself, but she was pleased at her friend's bold cleverness; and the intimacy between the two, which had slackened during these late months—indeed ever since madame's advent—was knit up into more than its former closeness. Josephine had her griefs to avenge, and Adelaide's sarcastic tongue did this work for her; while to Adelaide herself there was always Edgar in the background, and the day when he must return. And it was this fact of Edgar's return that made her hate madame so bitterly on the one hand, for fear of her undeniable sirenhood, and hold by the elderly sisters so closely on the other, for hope of the result of her intimacy. For indeed the Hill was a splendid property, and Edgar was not unpersonable.

So there was reason enough why the two should be continually together again, and why madame should smile to herself at the harmlessness of their revenge. She had the substance safe, and could well afford them the shadow as their target. It was like fighting with a cloud to try conclusions with madame. She never showed when she was hit. Her smile was just as sweet, her manner just as even, her speech and greeting just as smooth and genial as before. She betrayed no consciousness of cause, no perception of results. No coolness could dull her, impertinent looks and smiles fell dead, and not the most stinging sarcasm could irritate her to sharp reply. She caught all their spears on her shield, and her shield was impenetrable. Thus the unspoken feud burnt slowly on—the girls watchful and inimical, but madame determined not to give the enemy cause to rejoice by any imprudence on her side. Even Frank was forced to admit that she bore herself with consummate skill, and that she was the cleverest woman he knew.

"Too clever to be good," said Mrs. Harrowby, true to her colorless code of feminine negation; and her daughters echoed the sentiment.

Meanwhile, Leam underwent a daily torture, the effect of which was to harden

her more and more to the world outside, while driving her deeper into that recess where was her stronghold. She hated her lessons, not because they were lessons, but because they were things mamma had not taught her, and would have laughed to scorn had she heard of. It seemed to her an injury to mamma that she should learn all these funny things about places and people, the stars and the animals, that madame read to her from ugly little books, and that mamma had never known.

But what could she do? It was to no good that she sometimes ran away and hid for a whole day in one special part of Steel's Wood, braving the unknown perils of wild beasts and armed banditti to be found therein, if thereby she might escape madame. She thought she would rather run the danger of being devoured by the wolves and lions which she had not a doubt made their home in the dark parts of the wood, or of being carried off by the brigands who lived in the caves, than go to madame to feel that her mother was being insulted when unable to avenge herself, and that she, her little Leam, her own sweet heart, had joined hands in the blow.

Still, running away was of no avail. To escape one day out of seven or eight might be a gain of so many hours, but the permanent arrangement held fast. That went on whether she braved the perils of the wild beasts and armed banditti or not; and the only result of her absence to-day was to be taken personally in deep disgrace by her father to-morrow, scolded all the way there, and received by madame with maddening friendliness at the end.

Leam thought she could have borne it better had madame been cold and severe rather than so uniformly caressing and amiable. Had she rated her, or even beaten her, as her mother used to do, she would have been less reluctant, because she would have had something tangible to go on. As it was, she too felt as if beating herself against a cloud, and the plentiful outpour of honey in exchange for her own gall sickened her. That pleasant smile, those endearing words, that inexhaustible patience, revolted the girl, who saw in her smooth-faced "governess" only the woman whom her mother had distrusted and disliked. For herself personally, without those haunting reminiscences, she would have liked madame well enough; but now it would be unfaithful to mamma, and Leam could not be that. Living as she did in the one ever-active thought of her mother's unseen presence and continued existence, the influence of the past was never weakened, and Leam's heart clung to the mother unseen as her little arms used to cling round her in the days of her bodily existence. When the ladies of North Aston took it in hand to teach this young savage faith in the life after death, they did not think they were opening such a crooked door as this.

Thus the relations between Madame la Marquise de Montfort and her pupil were not exactly what might be termed of ideal harmoniousness, but madame never confessed her failure. On the contrary, she always spoke of Leam as a most fascinating child, charming to teach and interesting to study, and as improving daily under her care.

And when the neighbors said dubiously, "We do not see the improvement," she only smiled more sweetly than usual as she answered with her serene and noble air, "But I am conscious of it."

PART V.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT MUST COME.

IF Madame de Montfort could not teach Leam some of the things generally considered essential to the education of a gentlewoman, if her orthography was disorderly, her grammar shaky, her knowledge of geography, history and language best expressed by *x*, and her moral perceptions never clear and seldom straight, she was yet far in advance of a girl whose training in all things was so infinitely below even her own dwarfed standard. Madame could read with native grace and commendable fluency, making nimble leapfrogs over the heads of the exceptionally hard passages, but Leam had to spell every third word, and then she made a mess of it. Madame did know that eight and seven are fifteen, but Leam could not get beyond five and five are ten and one over makes eleven. If madame thought deception the indispensable condition of pleasant companionship, and lies the current coin of good society — in which she certainly sided with the majority of believing Christians — Leam would be none the worse for a little softening of that crude outspeaking of hers, which was less sincerity than the hardness of youthful ignorance and the insolence of false pride. If madame was only lacquer, and not clear gold all through, Leam had not the grace of even the thinnest layer of varnish, and might well take lessons in the religion of appearances and that thing which we call "manner." Madame did know at least how to bear herself with the seeming of a lady, and could say her shibboleth as it ought to be said. Thus, she ate with delicacy and held her knife nicely poised and balanced, but Leam grasped hers like a whanger, and cut off pieces of meat anyhow, which as often as not she took from the point. Mamma had eaten with her knife grasped also like a whanger, and why might not she? she said when madame remonstrated and gave her a lecture on the æsthetics of the table. And why should she not make her bread her plate, and hold both bread and meat in her hand if she liked? Why was she to wipe her lips when she drank? and why, traveling farther afield, was she to speak when she was spoken to if she would rather be silent? Why get up from her chair when ladies like Mrs. Harrowby and Mrs. Birkett came into the room? They did not get up from their chairs when she went into their rooms, and mamma never did. And why might she not say what she thought and show what she disliked? Mamma said what she thought and showed what she disliked, and mamma's rule was her law.

All these objections madame had to combat, and all these things to teach, and many more besides. And as Leam was young, and as even the hardest youth is unconsciously plastic because unconsciously imitative, the suave instructress did really make some impression; so that when she assured the incredulous neighborhood of Leam's improvement she had more solid data than always underlaid her words, and was partly justified in her assertion.

Religion, too, was another point on which the forces of new and old met in collision. Madame was of course what is meant by the word "religious." Like all persons trading on falsehood and living in deception, her orthodoxy was undoubted, and the most rigid investigation could not have discovered an unsound spot anywhere. She would as soon have thought of questioning her own existence as of doubting the literal exactness of the first chapter of Genesis, and she thought science an awfully wicked thing because it went to disprove the story of the six days. She firmly believed in the personality of Satan and material fires for wicked souls; and the sweet way in which she lamented the probable paucity

of the saved was extremely edifying, not to say touching. This childlike acceptance, this faithful orthodoxy, was one of the things for which the rector liked her so well. He had a profound contempt for science and skepticism together; and an unbeliever, even if learned in the stars and old bones, ranked with him as a knave or a fool, and sometimes both. His pet joke, which was not original, was that there was only one letter of difference between septic and skeptic, and of the two the skeptic was the more unsavory.

Being then pious, madame had hung about her walls short texts in fancy lettering, with a great deal of scroll-work in gold and carmine to make them look pretty. When she came into possession of Leam's mind, she was shocked at her ignorance of all the sayings that were so familiar to herself and other persons of respectability. Leam knew nothing but a few barbarous prayers to saints, used more after the fashion of charms than anything else, the ave and the paternoster said incorrectly and not understood when said. Wherefore madame caused to be illuminated some texts for her room too, as lessons always before her eyes, and counter-charms to those heathenish invocations in which the child put her sole faith and trust of salvation. And among other things she gave her the Ten Commandments, very charmingly done. Round each commandment were pictures, emblems, symbolic flowers, all enclosed in fancy scroll-work of an elaborate kind. Really, it was a very creditable piece of bastard art, and Mr. Dundas was moved almost to tears by it. Madame did it herself—so she said with a tender little smile—as her pleasant surprise for poor dear Leam on her fifteenth birthday. And Leam was so far tamed in that she suffered the Tables to be hung up in her bedroom, and even found pleasure in looking at them. The pictures of Ruth and Naomi; of the thief running away with the money-bags; of a woman lying prostrate with long hair, and a broken lily at her side; of a murdered man prone in the snow, and a frightened-looking bravo, half covering his face in his cloak, fleeing away in the darkness, with a bowl marked "poison" and a dagger dripping with blood in the margin,—all these pictures, which stood against the commandments they illustrated, fascinated her greatly. The colors and the gilding, the flowers and the emblems, pleased her, and she took the texts sandwiched between as the jalap in the jam. At first she thought it impious to have them there at all, because they were in the Bible, and mamma used to say that good Christians never read the Bible. It was a holy book which only priests might use, and when those pigs of Protestants looked into it and read it, just as they would read the newspaper, they profaned it. But by force of habit she reconciled herself to the profanity, and by frequent looking at the art got the literature into her head. And when it was there she did not find anything in it to be afraid of or to condemn as too mysteriously holy for her knowledge. All of which was so much to the good; and Mr. Dundas had no words strong enough whereby to express his gratitude to the fair woman who had saved his child from destruction by giving her the Ten Commandments made pretty by adjuncts of bastard art.

But had it not been for Alick Corfield, Madame la Marquise de Montfort would not have made quite so much way. Alick and Leam used to meet in Steel's Wood; and when Leam carried her perplexities to Alick, and Alick told her that she ought to yield and gave her the reasons why, after first fiercely combating him, telling him he was stupid, wicked, unkind, she always ended by promising to obey; and when Leam promised the things agreed to might be considered done. In point of fact, then, it was Alick who was really moulding her, in excess of that unconscious plasticity and imitation already spoken of. But this was one of the things which the world did not know, and where judgment went awry in consequence.

Of course the neighborhood saw what was coming—what must come, indeed, by the very force of circumstances. The friendship which had sprung up from the

first between Mr. Dundas and madame could not stop at friendship now, when both were free and evidently so necessary to each other. For madame, with that noble frankness backed by wise reticence characteristic of her, had told every one of her loss by which she had been necessitated to become Leam's governess; always adding, "So that I am glad to be able to work, seeing that I am obliged to do so, as I could not borrow, even for a short time: I am too proud for that, and I hope too honest."

Wherefore, as she was evidently Leam's salvation, according to her own account, and Sebastian was confessedly her income, and a very good one too, there was no reason why their several lines should not coalesce in an indissoluble union, and one home be made to serve them instead of two. As indeed it came about.

When the year of conventional mourning had been perfected, on the anniversary of the very day when poor Pepita died, the final words were said, the last frail barrier of madame's conjugal memories and widowed regrets was removed, and Sebastian Dundas went home the gladdest man in England. All that long bad past was now to be redeemed, and he had made a good bargain with life to have passed through even so much misery to come at the end into such reward.

Nothing startled him, nothing chilled him. When madame, laying her hand on his arm, said in a kind of playful candor infinitely bewitching, "Remember, dear friend, I told you beforehand that I have lost *all* my fortune; in marrying me you marry only myself with my past, my child and my liabilities," his mind repudiated the idea of the flimsiest shadow on that past, the faintest blur on its spotless record. As for her child, it was his: he would give it his name, it should be dearer to him than his own; which, all things considered, was not an overwhelming provision of love; and her liabilities, whatever they were, he would be glad to discharge them as a proof of his love for her and the forging of another golden link between them.

He doubted nothing, believed all, and loved as much as he believed. He was happy, radiant, content: the woman whom he loved loved him, and had consented to become his wife. In giving her dear self to him she was also accepting security and devotion at his hands; and what more can a true man want than to be of good service to the woman he loves? If women like to minister, it is the pride of men to protect; and if the vow to endow with all his worldly goods is a fable in fact, it is true as an instinctive feeling.

When Mrs. Harrowby heard that the marriage was positively arranged, she sat with her daughters at a kind of inquest on their dead friendship with Sebastian Dundas, and came to the conclusion that they must know something more definite now about this person calling herself Madame la Marquise de Montfort. As a stranger it was all very well to overlook the vagueness of her biography—they were not committed to anything really dangerous by simply visiting a householder among them — but it was another matter if she was to be married to one of themselves. Then they must learn who she really was, and Mr. Dundas must satisfy them scrupulously, else they should decline to know her.

"It will make a great gap in our society," said kindly Josephine, who, having the most to suffer, had forgiven the most readily.

"Gap or no gap, it is what we owe to ourselves," said Mrs. Harrowby.

"And to Edgar," added Maria.

"I shall call on Sebastian to-morrow," said Mrs. Harrowby, laying aside her knitting with the air of a minister who has dictated his protocol and has now only to sign the clean copy.

"Sleep on it, mamma," pleaded Josephine.

"It will make no difference," returned the mother; and her elder two echoed in concert, "I hope not."

The next day Mrs. Harrowby did call on Mr. Dundas, and, finding that gentleman at home, succeeded in speaking her mind. She conveyed her ultimatum as a corporate not individual resolution, speaking in the name of the "ladies of

the place," which she was scarcely entitled to do.

Mr. Dundas declined to satisfy her. Indeed, it would have been difficult for him to have done so, seeing that he knew no more of Madame de Montfort, his intended wife, than what they all knew; which was substantially nothing, unless her fancy autobiography could be called something. He spoke, however, as if he had her private memoirs and all the branches, roots and bole of the family tree in his pocket; and he spoke loftily, with the intimation that she was superior to all at North Aston, Mrs. Harrowby herself included.

This interview, with its demand unsatisfied and its assertions unproved, sent the coolness already existing between the Hill and Andalusia Cottage down to freezing-point; and the worst of it was that Mrs. Harrowby did not find backers. The neighborhood did not take up the cause as she expected it would. It halted midway and faced both sides, in the manner so dear to English respectability—less cordial to Mr. Dundas and madame than it would have been had Mrs. Harrowby been friendly, but unwilling to follow her to the bitter end. As they said to each other, it was all very well for Mrs. Harrowby to be so severe on the marriage, because she was angry and disappointed—and an angry and disappointed mother is ever unreasonable—but they who had no daughters to marry, really they did not see why they should persecute that poor madame who was such pleasant company, and had behaved herself with so much propriety since she came. And if Sebastian Dundas was going to make a second mistake, that was his lookout, and would be his punishment.

On the whole, the neighborhood when polled was decidedly more friendly than hostile. The Corfields and Fairbairns were, as they had always been, neutrals of a genial tint, more for than against; Mr. and Mrs. Birkett were warm partisans; and only Adelaide joined hands with the Hill and said that Mrs. Harrowby was justified in her renunciation and that madame was a wretch. And for the first time in her life the rector's daughter spoke compassionately of Leam and humanely of Pepita, saying of the one how much she pitied her, having such a woman for a stepmother; of the other, that, horrible as she was, at least they knew the worst of her, which was more than they could say of madame.

She made her father very angry when she said these things, but she repeated them, nevertheless; and she knew that he dared not scold her too severely before the world for fear of that little something called conscience, and knowledge of the reason why he believed in Madame de Montfort so implicitly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RECKONING WITH LEAM.

THE announcement of her father's intended marriage with madame came on Leam with a crushing sense of terror and despair. Unobservant youth sees little, and even what it does see it does not comprehend. Though the girl had accustomed herself by slow degrees to many works and ways which mamma had never known; though the faculties which had been, as it were, imprisoned by that close-set, hide-bound love of hers were now a little loosened and set free; though the activities of youth were stirring in her, and her inner life, if still isolated, was a shade more expanded than of old,—yet she had no desire for greater change, and she had no keener vision for the world outside herself than before. She saw nothing of that diabolical thing which her father and madame had been so long plotting as the outcome of their friendship, the parable of which her education had been the text. If her intelligence was warping out from the narrow limits in which her mother had confined it, it was still below the average—as much as her feverish love and tenacious loyalty were above. All that she knew was, mamma dead was the same as mamma living, only to be more tenderly dealt with, as she could not defend herself; and that she wondered how papa could be so wicked as to affront her now

that she was not able to punish him and let him know what she thought of him.

When he told her that he was going to give her a new mother, one whom she must love as she had loved her own poor dear mamma—he was so happy he could afford to be tender even to that terrible past and poor Pepita—Leam's first sensation was one of terror, her first movement one of repulsion. She flung off the hand which he had laid on her shoulder and drew back a few steps, facing him, her breath held, her tragic eyes flashing, her face struck to stone by what she had heard.

"Well, my dear, you need not look so surprised," said Mr. Dundas jauntily. "And you need not look so terrified. Your new mother will not hurt you."

"She shall not be my mother, papa," said Leam: "I will not own her."

"You will do what I tell you to do," her father returned with admirable self-command.

"Not when you tell me to do a crime," flashed Leam.

Mr. Dundas smiled. "Your words are a trifle strong," he said.

"It is a crime," she reiterated. "But if you have forgotten mamma, and want to affront her now that she cannot defend herself, I have not, and never will."

Mr. Dundas smiled again. If he was so happy that he could afford to be tender to the past, so also could he afford to be patient with the present. "Foolish child!" he said compassionately: "you do not understand things yet."

"I understand that I love mamma, and will not have this wicked woman in her place," said Leam hotly.

"I think you will," he answered, playing with his watch-guard. "And in the future, my little daughter, you will thank me."

"Thank you? For what?" asked Leam. "You made mamma miserable when she lived: you and your madame helped to kill her, and now you put this woman in her place! Papa, I wonder Saint Jago lets you live."

"As Saint Jago is kind enough to leave me in peace, perhaps you will follow his example. What a saint allows my little daughter may accept," said Mr. Dundas mockingly.

"No," said Leam with pathetic solemnity, "if the saints forget mamma, I will not."

"My dear, you are a fool," said Mr. Dundas.

"You may call me what you like, but madame shall not be my mother," returned Leam.

"Madame will be your mother because she will be my wife," said Mr. Dundas slowly. "Unfortunately for you—perhaps for myself also—neither you nor I can alter the law of the land. The child must accept the consequences of the father's act."

"Then I will kill her," cried Leam.

Her father laughed gayly. "I think we will brave this desperate danger," he said. "It is a fearful threat, I grant—an awful peril—but we must brave it, for all that."

"Papa," said Leam, "I will pray to the saints that when you die you may not go to heaven with mamma and me."

It was her last bolt, her supreme effort at threat and entreaty, and it meant everything. If her words of themselves would have amused Mr. Dundas as a child's ignorant impertinence, the superstition of an untaught, untutored mind, her looks and manner affected him painfully. True, he did not love her—on the contrary, he disliked her—but, all the same, she was his child; and, dissected, realized, it was rather an awful thing that she had said. It showed an amount of hatred and contempt which went far beyond his dislike for her, and made him shudder at the strength of feeling, the tenacity of hate, in one so young.

If more absurdity than good sense is talked about natural affection, still there is a residuum of fact underneath the folly; and Leam's words had struck down to that small residuum in her father's heart. It was not that he was wounded sentimentally so much as in his sense of proprietorship, his paternal superiority, and he was angry rather than sorrowful. It made him feel that he had borne with her waywardness long enough now: it was time to put a stop to it. "Now, Leam, no

more insolence and no more nonsense," he said sternly. "You have tried my patience long enough. This day month I marry Madame de Montfort, with or without your pleasure, my little girl. In a month after that I bring her home here as my wife, consequently your mother, the mistress of the house and of you. I give you the best guide, the best friend, you have ever had or could have: you will live to value her as she deserves. Your own mother was not fit to guide you: your new one will make you all that my dearest hopes would have you. Now go. Think over what I have said. If you do not like our arrangements, so much the worse for you."

"The saints will never let her come here as my mother. I will pray to them night and day to kill her," said Leam in a deep voice, clenching her hands and setting her small square teeth, as her mother used to set hers, like a trap.

Naturally, the second Mrs. Dundas could not be brought home without a certain upsetting of the old order and a rearrangement of things to suit the new. And the upsetting was not stinted, nor were the exertions of Mr. Dundas. He superintended everything himself, to the choice of a tea-cup, the looping of a curtain, and racked his brains to make his beloved's bower the fit expression of his love, though never to his mind could it be worthy of her deserving. There was not an ornament in the place but was dedicated to her, placed where she could see it on such and such an occasion, and shifted twenty times a day for a more advantageous position. Everything which the house had of most beautiful was pressed into her service, and even Leam's natural rights of inheritance were ignored for madame's better endowing. Lace, jewelry, trinkets, all that had been Pepita's, was now hers, and the man's restless desire to make her rich and her home beautiful seemed insatiable.

But there was always Leam in the background with whom he had to reckon—Leam, who wandered through the house in her straight-cut, plain black gown, made in the deepest fashion of mourning devisable, pale, silent, feverish, like an avenging spirit on his track; undoing what he had done if he had profaned an embodied memory of her mother, and as impervious to his anger as he was to her despair.

One day he carried from the drawing-room to the boudoir which was to be madame's, and had been Pepita's, a certain Spanish vase which had been a favorite ornament with her because it reminded her of home. He firmly fixed it on the bracket destined for it, opposite the couch where he longed so ardently to see his fair and queenly loved one sitting—he by her side in the lovers' paradise of secure content; but the next time he went into the room he found it lying in fragments on the floor. None of the servants knew how the mischance had happened: the window was not open, and none of them had been in the room. How, then, came it there, broken on the floor? When he asked Leam, watching by in that pale, feverish, avenging way of hers, he knew the truth.

"Yes," she said defiantly, "I broke it. It was mamma's, and your madame shall not have it."

"If you intend to go on like this I shall have you sent to school or shut up in a lunatic asylum," cried Mr. Dundas in extreme wrath.

"Then I shall be alone with mamma, and shall not see you or your madame," answered Leam, unconquered.

"You are a hardened, shameful, wicked girl," said her father angrily. "Madame is an angel of goodness to undertake the care of such a wretched creature as you are. I could not do too much for her if I gave her all I had, and you can never be grateful enough for such a mother."

"She is not my mother, and she shall not pollute mamma's things," Leam answered with passionate solemnity. "If you give them to her I will break or burn them. Mamma's things are her own, and she shall not be made unhappy in heaven."

Provoked beyond himself, Sebastian Dundas said scornfully, "Heaven! You talk of heaven as if you knew all about it, Leam, like the next parish. How do

you know she is there, and not in the place of torment instead? Your mother was scarcely of the stuff of which angels are made."

"Then if she is in the place of torment, she is unhappy enough as it is, and need not be made more so," said faithful Leam, suddenly breaking into piteous weeping; adding through her sobs, "and madame shall not have her things."

Her tenacity carried the day so far that Mr. Dundas left off rearranging the old, and sent up to London for things new and without embarrassing memories attached to them. On which Leam swept off all that had been her mother's, and [illegible] up her treasures in her own private cupboard, carrying the key in the hiding-place which that mother had [illegible]ht her to use, the thick coils of her [illegible]nd her father, warned by that [illegible] of the vase, and a little dom[illegible]not to say appalled, by her resolute fidelity, shut his eyes to her domestic larceny and let her carry off her relics in safety.

So the time passed, miserably enough to the one, if full of hope and the promise of joy to the other; and the wedding morning came whereon Sebastian Dundas was to be made, as he phrased it, happy for life.

It had been madame's desire that Leam should be her bridesmaid. She had laid great stress on this, and her lover would have gratified her if he could. He had no wish that way—rather the contrary—but her will was his law, and he did his best to carry it into effect. But when he told Leam what he wanted—and he told her quite carelessly, and so much as a matter of course that he hoped she too would accept her position as a matter of course—the girl, enlightened by love if not by knowledge, broke into a torrent of disdain that soon showed him how sleeveless his errand was likely to be.

He did his best, and tried all methods from pleading to threatening, but Leam was immovable. No power on earth should bend her, she said, or make her take part in that wicked day. She go to church? She would expect to be struck dead if she did. She expected, indeed, that all of them would be struck dead. She had prayed the saints so hard, so hard, to prevent this marriage, she was sure they would at the last; and if they did not, she would never believe in them nor pray to them again. But she did believe in them, and she was sure they would punish this dreadful crime. No, she would take no part in it. Why should she put herself in the way of being punished when she was not to blame?

So Mr. Dundas had the mortification of carrying to his bride-elect the intelligence that he had been worsted in his conflict with his daughter, and that her hatred and reluctance were to be neither concealed nor overcome.

Madame was sorry, she said with her sweetest air of patience and liberal comprehension. She would have liked the dear girl to have been her bridesmaid: it would have been appropriate and touching. But as she declined—and her feelings were easy to be understood and honorable, if a little extreme—she, madame, elected to be married as a widow should, with only Mrs. Birkett and Mr. Fairbairn as the witnesses, Mr. Fairbairn to give her away for form's sake. The dear rector of course would marry them in this simple manner. They must hope that time and her own unvarying affection—Mr. Dundas called it sweetness, angelic patience, greatness of soul—would soften poor Leam into loving acceptance of what would be so much to her good when she could be got to understand it. Meanwhile they must be patient—content to go gradually and gain her bit by bit. She, madame, would be quite content with her presence in the room, when they returned to breakfast, in the pretty white muslin frock ordered from town as the sign of her participation in the event.

But when the morning came, where was Leam? The most diligent search failed to discover her, and the only person who could have betrayed her whereabouts was the last whom they would have thought of asking.

Of course, Mr. Dundas was properly distressed at this strange disappearance, and madame was unduly afflicted. She proposed that the marriage should be de-

layed till the girl was found, but the lover was stronger than the father, and she was overruled—yielding because it is the duty of the wife to yield, but only because of that duty—for her own part desirous of delay until they were assured of the safety of Leam.

The ceremony, however, was performed within the canonical hours, the rector a little tremulous and apparently suffering from sore throat; and as the happy pair drove away, madame, remembering her advent and her objects more than a year ago now, could not but confess that she had done better than she expected, and, her conscience whispered, better than she deserved.

All this time Leam was sitting on the lower branches of the yew tree beneath which that godless ruffian had murdered his poor sweetheart two generations ago in Steel's Wood. It was a lonely corner, where no one would have gone by choice at the best of times, but now, with its bad name and evil association, it was entirely deserted. Leam had made it her hiding-place ever since madame had taken her in hand to teach her the correct pronunciation of Shibboleth, and she had escaped from her teaching and run away into the wood, armed banditti and wild beasts notwithstanding. And one day, hunting in it for fungi, Alick Corfield had found her sitting there, and thenceforth they had shared the retreat between them.

No one knew that they met there, and no one suspected it—not even Mrs. Corfield, who believed, after the manner of mothers who bring up their boys at home, that she knew the whole of her son's life from end to end, and that he had not a thought kept back from her, nor had ever committed an action of which she was not cognizant.

Alick had installed Leam as the girl-queen of his imagination, and paid her the homage which she seemed to him to deserve more than many a real queen crowned and sceptered or princess born in the purple. It pleased him to write bad poems to her as his Infanta, his royal rose, his pomegranate flower, his nestling eagle waiting for strength to fly upward to the sun—all with halting feet and strained metaphor. He drew pictures of her by the dozen, mostly symbolic and all out of drawing, but expressive of his admiration, his hope, his respect; while to Leam he was little better than a two-legged talking dog whose knowledge interested and whose goodness swayed her, but on whose neck she set her little foot and kept it there. She always treated him with profound disdain, even when he told her curious things that were like fairy-tales, some of which she did not believe if they were too far removed from the narrow area of her personal experience. Thus, when he assured her that certain plants fed on flies as men feed on meat, she told him with her sublime Spanish calm, "I do not believe it." And she said the same when he one day informed her that the planets could be weighed and their distance from the earth and the sun measured. In the beginning she knew nothing—neither whether the earth was round or flat, nor what was the meaning of the stars, nor the name of one wild flower excepting daisies, nor of one great man. That fallow waste called her mind was virgin ground in truth, but Alick was patient, and labored hard at the stubborn soil; and when madame had given the credit to her own tact and those ugly little books from which she taught, it was to him really that Leam's microscopic amount of plasticity and reception was due.

These secret meetings amused Leam, and kept her from that ceaseless inward contemplation of her mother which else was her only voluntary occupation. They gave her a sense of power, as well as of successful rebellion to her father, that gratified her pride. To be sure, they were not what mamma would have liked. Alick Corfield was an Englishman, and mamma hated the English. But then, Leam reflected, she had not known Alick: if she had, she would have seen there was no harm in him, and that he was not teaching her things which a child of Spain ought not to know, and which Saint Jago would be angry with her for learning. And per-

haps now that mamma was up in heaven, and knew all that went on here at home, she would not mind her little Leama seeing Alick Corfield so often. In her prayers she told her very faithfully all that she had done and felt and thought; she never deceived her a hair's breadth; and as she had asked her permission so often and so humbly, she made sure now that it was granted. Mamma could not refuse her when she asked her so earnestly; and she was not angry, but on the contrary glad, that her little heart had such a good dog to care for her, and that she was defying el señor papa, that false image of the false saint.

For the rest, it was only natural that she should like the air of quasi adventure and independence which this unknown intercourse with Alick gave her. And as she was still in that conscienceless phase of youth when liking means everything, and honor without love is a grass having neither root nor flower, she continued to meet her faithful dog, and to learn from him—not all that he could tell her, but what she chose to accept.

So here it was, perched among the lower branches of the yew tree in Steel's Wood, that Leam spent her father's wedding-day with Madame la Marquise de Montfort; and when she became hungry Alick went home and brought her some dry bread and grapes from Steel's Corner. Dry bread and grapes—this was all that she would have, she said. She was not greedy like the English, who thought of nothing but eating, she added in her disdainful way; and if Alick brought her anything but bread and grapes, she would fling it into the wood. On his life he was not to touch anything on papa's table. She would rather die of hunger than eat their wicked food. She wondered it did not choke them both.

"Now go," she said superbly, "and come back soon: I am hungry," as if her sense of inconvenience was a catastrophe which heaven and earth should be moved to avert.

But young and so beautiful as she was, her little tricks of pride and arbitrariness were just so many additional charms to Alick; and if she had not flouted and commanded him, he would have thought that something terrible was about to happen: had she become docile, grateful, familiar, he would have expected her to die before the day was out. He liked her superb assumption of superiority. She was his girl-queen, and he was her slave; she was his mistress, and he was her dog; and, dog-like, he fawned at her feet even when she rated him and placed her little foot on his neck.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT STEEL'S CORNER.

"I HOPE you will not be bored, my boy, but I am thinking of bringing that wretched Leam Dundas here for a few days. I don't like a girl of her age and character to be left for a full month alone. It is not right, for who knows what she may not do? If she ran away on the wedding-day, she may run away again, and then where would we all be? I cannot think what her father was about to leave her unprotected like this. So I shall just take and bring her here; and if you are bored with her, you must make the best of it."

Mrs. Corfield and Alick were sitting in the "work-room" on the morning of the fifth day after the marriage, when the thought struck the little woman of the propriety of Leam's visit to them for the month of her father's absence. She did not see her son's face when she spoke, being busy with her wood-carving. If she had, she would not have thought that the presence of Leam Dundas would bore or annoy him. The clumsy features gladdened into smiles, the dull eye brightened, the dim complexion flushed: if ever a face expressed supreme delight, Alick's did then; and it expressed what he felt, for, as we know, the one love of his boyish life was this girl-queen of his fancy. Not that he was in love with her in the ordinary sense of being in love. He was too reverent and she too young for vulgar passion or commonplace sentiment. She was something precious to his imagination, not his senses, like a child-queen to her courtier, a high-born lady to her

page. He bore with her girlish temper, her girlish insolence of pride, her ignorant opposition, with the humility of strength bending its neck to weakness —the devotion and unselfish sweetness characteristic of him in other of his relations than those with Leam. Judge, then, if he was likely to be bored, as his mother feared, or if this project of a closer domestication with her was not rather a "bit of blue" in his sky which made these early autumn days gladder than the gladdest summer-time.

To will and to do were synonymous with Mrs. Corfield: her motto was *velle est agere;* and a resolve once taken was like iron at white heat, struck into the shape of deed on the instant. Darting up from her chair, birdlike and angular, she put away her work. "Order the trap," she said briskly, "and come with me. We will go at once, before that poor creature has had time to do anything wild or silly."

"I do not think she would do anything wild or silly, mother," said Alick in a deprecating voice. It galled him to hear his darling spoken of so slightingly.

"No? What has she ever done that was rational?" cried his mother sharply. "From the beginning, when she was a baby of three months old, and howled at me because I kissed her, and that dreadful mother of hers flew at me like a wildcat and said I had the evil eye, Leam Dundas has been more like some changeling than an ordinary English girl. I declare it sometimes makes my heart ache to see her with those awful eyes of hers, looking as if she had seen one does not know what—as if she was being literally burnt up alive with sorrow. However, don't let us discuss her: let us fetch her and save her from herself. That is more to the purpose at this moment."

And Alick said "Yes," and went out to order the trap with alacrity.

When they reached Andalusia Cottage, the first thing they saw was a strange workman from Sherrington painting out the name which in his early love-days for his Spanish bride Sebastian Dundas had put up in bold letters across the gateposts. The original name of the place had been Ford House, but the old had had to give place to the new in those days as in these, and Ford House had been rechristened Andalusia Cottage as a testimony and an homage. Mrs. Corfield questioned the man in her keen inquisitorial way as to what he was about; and when he told her that the posts were to show "Virginia" now instead of "Andalusia," her great disgust, to judge by the sharp things which she said to him, seemed as if it took in the innocent hand as well as the peccant head. "I do think Sebastian Dundas is bewitched," she said disdainfully to her son as they drove up to the house. "Did any one ever hear of such a lunatic? Changing the name of his house with his wives in this manner, and expecting us to remember all his absurdities! Such a man as that to be a father! Lord of the creation, indeed! He is no better than a court fool." Which last scornful ejaculation brought the trap to the front door and into the presence of Leam.

Standing on the lawn bareheaded in the morning sunshine, doing nothing and apparently seeing nothing, dressed in the deepest mourning she could make for herself, and with her high comb and mantilla, as in olden days, her eyes fixed on the ground and her hands clasped in each other, her wan face set and rigid, her whole attitude one of mute, unfathomable despair, — for the instant even Mrs. Corfield, with all her constitutional contempt for youth, felt hushed, as in the presence of some deep human tragedy, at the sight of this poor sorrowful child, this miserable mourner of fifteen. Instead of speaking in her usual quick manner, the sharp-faced little woman, poor Pepita's "crooked stick," went up to the girl quietly and softly touched her arm.

Leam slowly raised her eyes. She did not start or cry out as a creature naturally would if startled, but she seemed as if she gradually and with difficulty awakened from sleep, or from something even more profound than sleep. "Yes?" she said in answer to the touch. "What do you want?"

It was an odd question, and Leam's

grave intensity made it all the more odd. But Mrs. Corfield was not easily disconcerted, and it was "only Leam" at the worst.

"I want you," she answered briskly. "Tell the maid to pack up your box, take off that lace thing on your head, and come home with me for a day or two. You need not stay longer than you like, but it will be better for you than moping here, thinking of all sorts of things you had better not think of."

"Why do my thoughts vex you?" asked Leam gravely. "I was not thinking of you."

Mrs. Corfield laughed a little confusedly. "I don't suppose you were," she said, "but you see I did think of you. But whether you were thinking of me or not, you certainly look as if you would be the better for a little rousing. You were standing there like a statue when we came up."

"I was listening to mamma," said Leam with an air of grave rebuke.

Mrs. Corfield rubbed her nose vigorously. "You would do better to come and talk to me instead," she said.

Leam transfixed her with her eyes. "I like mamma's company best," she said in the stony way which she had when stiffening herself against outside influence.

"But if you come to us, you can listen to her as much as you like," said Alick soothingly. "We will not hinder you; and, as my mother says, it is not good for you to be here alone."

"I like it," said Leam.

"Nonsense! then you should not like it. It is not natural for a girl of your age to like it. Come with us," cried Mrs. Corfield: "why not?"

"I have something to do," Leam answered solemnly.

"What can a chit of a thing like you have to do? Come with us, I tell you." Mrs. Corfield said this heartily rather than roughly, though really she could not be bothered, as she said to herself, to stand there wasting her time in arguing with a girl like Leam. It was too ridiculous.

Leam looked at her with mingled tragedy and contempt, and disdained to answer.

"What have you got to do?" again asked Mrs. Corfield.

"I shall not tell you," answered Leam, holding her head very high.

How, indeed, should she tell this little sharp-faced woman that she was thinking how she could prevent madame from coming here as her home? The saints had deserted her; she had prayed to them, threatened them, coaxed, entreated, but they had not heard her; and now she had nothing but herself, only her poor little frail hands and bewildered brain, to protect her mother's memory from insult and revenge her wrongs. The fever in her veins had given her mamma's face sorrowful and weeping, meeting her wherever she turned—mamma's voice, faint as the softest summer breeze in the trees, whispering to her, "Little Leama, I am unhappy. Sweet heart, do not let me be unhappy." For five days this fancy had haunted her, but it had not become distinct enough for guidance. She was listening now, as she was listening always, for mamma to tell her what to do. She was sure she would show her in time how to prevent that wicked woman from living here, bearing her name, taking her place: mamma could trust her to take care of her, now that she could not take care of herself. As she had said to papa, if all the world, the saints, and God himself deserted her, she, her child, would not.

She would not tell these thoughts, even to Alick. They were a secret, sacred between her and mamma, and no one must share them. If, then, she went with this bird-like, insistent woman, she would talk to her and not let her think: she and Alick would stand between herself and mamma's spirit, and then mamma would perhaps leave her again, and go back to heaven angry with her. No, she would not go, and she lifted up her eyes to say so.

As she looked up Alick whispered softly, "Come."

Feverish, excited, her brain clouded by her false fancies, Leam did not recognize his voice. To her it was her

mother sighing through the sunny stillness, bidding her go with them, perhaps to find some method of hinderance or revenge which she could not devise for herself. They were clever and knew more than she did: perhaps her mother and the saints had sent them as her helpers.

It seemed almost an eternity during which these thoughts passed through her brain, while she stood looking at Mrs. Corfield so intently that the little woman was obliged to lower her eyes. Not that Leam saw her. She was thinking, listening, but not seeing, though her tragic eyes seemed searching Mrs. Corfield's very soul. Then, glancing upward to the sky, she said with an air of self-surrender, which Alick understood if his mother did not, "Yes, I will go with you: mamma says I may."

"It is my belief, Alick," said Mrs. Corfield, when she had left them to prepare for her visit, "that poor child is going crazy, if she is not so already. She always was queer, but she is certainly not in her right mind now. What a shame of Sebastian Dundas to bring her up as he has done, and now to leave her like this! How glad I am I thought of having her at Steel's Corner!"

"Yes, mother, it was a good thing. Just like you, though," said Alick affectionately.

"You must help me with her, Alick," answered his mother. "I have done what I know I ought to do, but she will be an awful nuisance all the same. She is so odd and cold and impertinent, one does not know how to take her."

Alick flushed and turned away his head. "I will take her off your hands as much as I can," he said in a constrained voice.

"That's my dear boy—do," was his mother's unsuspecting rejoinder as Leam came down stairs ready to go.

Steel's Corner was a place of unresting intellectual energies. Dr. Corfield, a man shut up in his laboratory with piles of extracts, notes, arguments, never used, but always to be used, an experimentalist deep in many of the toughest problems of chemical analysis, but neither ambitious nor communicative, was the one peaceable element in the house. To be sure, Alick would have been both broader in his aims and more concentrated in his objects had he been left to himself. As it was, the incessant demands made on him by his mother kept him too in a state of intellectual nomadism; and no one could weary of monotony where Mrs. Corfield set the pattern, unless it was of the monotony of unrest. This perpetual taking up of new subjects, new occupations, made thoroughness the one thing unattainable. Mrs. Corfield was a woman who went in for everything. She was by turns scientific and artistic, a student and a teacher, but she was too discursive to be accurate, and she was satisfied with a proficiency far below perfection. In philosophy she was what might be called a woman of antepenultimates, referring all the more intricate moral and intellectual phenomena to mind and spirit; but she was intolerant of any attempt to determine the causation of her favorite causes, and she derided the modern doctrines of evolution and inherent force as atheistic because materialistic. The two words meant the same thing with her; and the more shadowy and unintelligible people made the *causa causarum* the more she believed in their knowledge and their piety. The bitterest quarrel she had ever had was with an old friend, an unimaginative anatomist, who one day gravely proved to her that spirits must be mere filmy bags, pear-shaped, if indeed they had any visual existence at all. Bit by bit he eliminated all the characteristics and circumstances of the human form on the principle of the non-survival of the useless and unadaptable. For of what use are shapes and appliances if you have nothing for them to do?—if you have no need to walk, to grasp, nor yet to sit? Of what use organs of sense when you have no brain to which they lead?—when you are substantially all brain and the result independent of the method? Hence he abolished by logical and anatomical necessity, as well as the human form, the human face with eyes, ears, nose and mouth, and by the inex-

orable necessities of the case came down to a transparent bag, pear-shaped, for the better passage of his angels through the air.

"A fulfillment of the old proverb that extremes meet," he said by way of conclusion. "The beginning of man an ascidian—his ultimate development as an angel, a pear-shaped, transparent bag."

Mrs. Corfield never forgave her old friend, and even now if any one began a conversation on the theory of development and evolution she invariably lost her temper and permitted herself to say rude things. Her idea of angels and souls in bliss was the good orthodox notion of men and women with exactly the same features and identity as they had when in the flesh, but infinitely more beautiful; retaining the Ego, but the Ego refined and purified out of all trace of human weakness, all characteristic passions, tempers and proclivities; and the pear-shaped bag was as far removed from the truth, as she held it, on the one side as Leam's materialistic conception was on the other. The character and condition of departed souls was one of the subjects on which she was very positive and very aggressive, and Leam had a hard fight of it when her hostess came to discuss her mother's present personality and whereabouts, and wanted to convince her of her transformation.

All the same, the little woman was kind-hearted and conscientious, but she was not always pleasant. She wanted the grace and sweetness known generically as womanliness, as do most women who hold the doctrine of feminine moral supremacy, with base man, tyrant, enemy and inferior, holding down the superior being by force of brute strength and responsible for all her faults. And she wanted the smoothness of manner known as good breeding. Though a gentlewoman by birth, she gave one the impression of a pert chambermaid matured into a tyrannical landlady.

But she meant kindly by Leam when she took her from the loneliness of her father's house, and her very sharpness and prickly spiritualism were for the child's enduring good. Her attempts, however, to make Leam regard mamma in heaven as in any wise different from mamma on earth were utterly abortive. Leam's imagination could not compass the thaumaturgy tried to be inculcated. Mamma, if mamma at all, was mamma as she had known her; and if as she had known her, then she was unhappy and desolate, seeing what a wicked thing this was that papa had done. She clung to this point as tenaciously as she clung to her love; and nothing that Mrs. Corfield, or even Alick, could say weakened by one line her belief in mamma's angry sorrow and the saints' potent and sometimes peccant humanity.

Among other scientific appliances at Steel's Corner was a small off-kind of laboratory for Alick and his mother, to prevent their troubling the doctor and to enable them to help him when necessary: it was an auxiliary fitted up in what was rightfully the stick-house. The sticks had had to make way for retorts and crucibles, and as yet no harm had come of it, though the servants said they lived in terror of their lives, and the neighbors expected daily to hear that the inmates of Steel's Corner had been blown into the air. Into this evil-smelling and unbeautiful place Leam was introduced with infinite reluctance on her own part. The bad smell made her sick, she said, turning round disdainfully on Alick, and she did not wonder now at anything he might say or do if he could bear to live in such a horrid place as this.

When he showed off a few simple experiments to amuse her—made crystal trees, a shower of snow, a heavy stone out of two empty-looking bottles, spilt mercury and set her to gather it up again, showed her prisms, and made her look through a bit of tourmaline, and in every way conceivable to him strewed the path of learning with flowers—then she began to feel a little interest in the place and left off making wry faces at the dirt and the smells.

One day when she was there her eye caught a very small phial with a few letters like a snake running spirally round it.

"What is that funny little bottle?" she

asked, pointing it out. "What does it say?"

"Poison," said Alick.

"What is poison?" she asked.

"Do you mean what it is? or what it does?" he returned.

"Both. You are stupid," said Leam.

"What it does is to kill people, but I cannot tell you all in a breath what it is, for it is so many things."

"How does it kill people?" At her question Leam turned suddenly round on him, her eyes full of a strange light.

"Some poisons kill in one way and some in another," answered Alick.

Leam pondered for a few moments; then she asked, "How much poison is there in the world?"

"An immense deal," said Alick: "I cannot possibly tell you how much."

"And it all kills?"

"Yes, it all kills, else it is not poison."

"And every one?"

"Yes, every one if enough is taken."

"What is enough?" she asked, still so serious, so intent.

Alick laughed. "That depends on the material," he said. "One grain of some and twenty of others."

"Don't laugh," said Leam with her Spanish dignity: "I am serious. You should not laugh when I am serious."

"I did not mean to offend you," faltered Alick humbly. "Will you forgive me?"

"Yes," said Leam superbly, "if you will not laugh again. Tell me about poison."

"What can I tell you? I scarcely know what it is you want to hear."

"What is poison?"

"Strychnine, opium, prussic acid, belladonna, aconite—oh, thousands of things."

"How do they kill?"

"Well, strychnine gives awful pain and convulsions — makes the back into an arch; opium sends you to sleep; prussic acid stops the action of the heart; and so on."

"What is that?" asked Leam, pointing to the small phial with its snake-like spiral label.

"Prussic acid — awfully strong. Two drops of that would kill the strongest man in a moment."

"In a moment?" asked Leam.

"Yes: he would fall dead directly."

"Would it be painful?"

"No, not at all, I believe."

"Show it me," said Leam.

He took the bottle from the shelf. It was a sixty-minim bottle, quite full, stoppered and secured.

She held out her hand for it, and he gave it to her. "Two drops!" mused Leam.

"Yes, two drops," returned Alick.

"How many drops are here?"

"Sixty."

"Is it nasty?"

"No—like very strong bitter almonds or cherry-water; only in excess," he said. "Here is some cherry-water. Will you have a little in some water? It is not nasty, and it will not hurt you."

"No," said Leam with an offended air: "I do not want your horrid stuff."

"It would not hurt you, and it is really rather nice," returned Alick apologetically.

"It is horrid," said Leam.

"Well, perhaps you are better without it," Alick answered, quietly taking the bottle of prussic acid from her hands and replacing it on the shelf, well barricaded by phials and pots.

"You should not have taken it till I gave it you," said Leam proudly. "You are rude."

From this time the laboratory had the strangest fascination for Leam. She was never tired of going there, never tired of asking questions, all bearing on the subject of poisons, which seemed to have possessed her. Alick, unsuspecting, glad to teach, glad to see her interest awakened in anything he did or knew, in his own honest simplicity utterly unable to imagine that things could turn wrong on such a matter, told her all she asked and a great deal more; and still Leam's eyes wandered ever to the shelf where the little phial of thirty deaths was enclosed within its barricades.

One day while they were there Mrs. Corfield called Alick.

"Wait for me, I shall not be long," he said to Leam, and went out to his mother.

As he turned Leam's eyes went again to that small phial of death on the shelf.

"Take it, Leama! take it, my heart!" she heard her mother whisper.

"Yes, mamma," she said aloud; and leaping like a young panther on the bench, reached to the shelf and thrust the little bottle in her hair. She did not know why she took it: she had no motive, no object. It was mamma who told her — so her unconscious desire translated itself—but she had no clear understanding why. It was instinct, vague but powerful, lying at the back of her mind, unknown to herself that it was there; and all of which she was conscious was a desire to possess that bottle of poison, and not to let them know here that she had taken it.

This was on the afternoon of her last day at the Corfields. She was to go home to-night in preparation for the arrival of her father and madame to-morrow, and in a few hours she would be away. She did not want Alick to come back to the laboratory. She was afraid that he would miss the bottle which she had secured so almost automatically if so superstitiously: Alick must not come back. She must keep that bottle. She hurried across the old-time stick-house, locked the door and took the key with her, then met Alick coming back to finish his lesson on the crystallization of alum, and said, "I am tired of your colored doll's jewelry. Come and tell me about flowers," leading the way to the garden.

Doubt and suspicion were qualities unknown to Alick Corfield. It never occurred to him that his young queen was playing a part to hide the truth, befooling him for the better concealment of her misdeeds. He was only too happy that she condescended to suggest how he should amuse her; so he went with her into the garden, where she sat on the rustic chair, and he brought her flowers and told her the names and the properties as if he had been a professor.

At last Leam sighed. "It is very tiresome," she said wearily. "I should like to know as much as you do, but half of it is nonsense, and it makes my head ache to learn. I wish I had my dolls here, and that you could make them talk as mamma used. Mamma made them talk and go to sleep, but you are stupid: you can speak only of flowers that don't feel, and about your silly crystals that go to water if they are touched. I like my zambomba and my dolls best. They do not go to water: my zambomba makes a noise, and my dolls can be beaten when they are naughty."

"But you see I am not a girl," said Alick blushing.

"No," said Leam, "you are only a boy. What a pity!"

"I am sorry if you would like me better as a girl," said Alick.

She looked at him superbly. Then her face changed to something that was almost affection as she answered in a softer tone, "You would be better as a girl, of course, but you are good for a boy, and I like you the best of every one in England now. If only you had been an Andalusian woman!" she sighed, as, in obedience to Mrs. Corfield's signal, she got up to prepare for dinner, and then home for her father and madame to-morrow.

CHAPTER XX.

IN HER MOTHER'S PLACE.

WHATEVER madame's past life had been—and it had been such as a handsome woman without money or social status, fond of luxury and to whom work was abhorrent, with a clear will and very distinct knowledge of her own desires, clever and destitute of moral principle, finds made to her hand—whatever ugly bits were hidden behind the veil of decent pretence which she had worn with such grace during her sojourn at North Aston, she did honestly mean to do righteously now.

She had deceived the man who had married her in such adoring good faith—granted; but when he had reconciled himself to as much of the cheat as he must know, she meant to make him happy—so happy that he should not regret what he had done. Though she was no

marquise, only plain Madame de Montfort—so far she must confess for policy's sake, and to forestall discovery by ruder means, but what remained beyond she must keep secret as the grave, trusting to favorable fortune and man's honor for her safety—though the story of the fraudulent trustee was untrue, and she never had more money than the three hundred pounds brought in her box wherewith to plant her roots in the North Aston soil—though all the Lionnet bills were yet to be paid, and her husband must pay them, with awkward friends in London occasionally turning up to demand substantial sops, else they would show their teeth unpleasantly,—still, she would get his forgiveness, and she would make him happy.

And she would be good to Leam. She would be so patient, forbearing, tender, she would at last force the child to love her. It was a new luxury to this woman, who had knocked about the world so long and so disreputably, to feel safe and able to be good. She wondered what it would be like as time went on—if the rest which she felt now at the cessation of the struggle and the consciousness of her security would become monotonous or be always restful. At all events, she knew that she was happy for the day, and she trusted to her own tact and management to make the future as fair as the present.

The home-coming was triumphant. Because the rector was inwardly grieved at the loss of his ewe-lamb—for he had lost her in that special sense of spiritual proprietorship which had been his—he was determined to make a demonstration of his joy. He and Mrs. Birkett meant to stand by Mrs. Dundas as they had stood by Madame la Marquise de Montfort, and to publish their partisanship broadly. When, therefore, the travelers returned to North Aston, they found the rector and his wife waiting to receive them at their own door. Over the gate was an archway of evergreens with "Welcome!" in white chrysanthemums, and the posts were wreathed with boughs and ribbons, but leaving "Virginia Cottage" in its glossy evidence of the new régime. The drive was bordered all through with flowers from the rectory garden, and Lionnet too had been ransacked, and the hall was festooned from end to end with garlands, like a transformation-scene in a pantomime. One might have thought it the home-coming of a young earl with his girl-bride, rather than that of a middle-aged widower of but moderate means with his second wife, one of whose past homes had been in St. John's Wood, and one of her many names Mrs. Harrington.

But it pleased the good souls who thus displayed their sympathy, and it gratified those for whom it had all been done; and both husband and wife expressed their gratitude warmly, and lived up to the occasion in the emotion of the moment.

When their effusiveness had a little calmed down, when Mrs. Dundas had caressed her child—which poor Mrs. Birkett gave up to her with tears—and Mr. Dundas had also taken it in his arms and called it "Little Miss Dundas" and "My own little Fina" tenderly—when the servants had been spoken to prettily and the bustle had somewhat subsided, Mrs. Dundas looked round for something missing. "And where is dear Leam?" she asked with her gracious air and sweet smile.

It was very nice of her to be the first to miss the girl. The father had forgotten her, friends had overlooked her, but the stepmother, the traditional oppressor, was thoughtful of her, and wanted to include her in the love afloat. This little circumstance made a deep impression on the three witnesses. It was a good omen for Leam, and promised what indeed her new mother did honestly design to perform.

"Even that little savage must be tamed by such persistent sweetness," said Mr. Birkett to his wife, while she, with a kindly half-checked sigh, true to her central quality of maternity and love of peace all round, breathed "Poor little Leam!" compassionately.

Leam, however, was no more to the fore at the home-coming than she had been at the marriage, and much searching went on before she was found. She was unearthed at last. The gardener had seen her shrink away into the shrub-

bery when the carriage-wheels were heard coming up the road, and he gave information to the cook, by whom the truant was tracked and brought to her ordeal.

Mrs. Birkett went out by the French window to meet her as she came slowly up the lawn draped in the deep mourning which for the very contrariety of love she had made deeper since the marriage, her young head bent to the earth, her pale face rigid with despair, her heart full of but one feeling, her brain racked with but one thought, "Mamma is crying in heaven: mamma must not cry, and this stranger must be swept from her place."

She did not know how this was to be done: she only knew that it must be done. She had all along expected the saints to work some miracle of deliverance for her, and she looked hourly for its coming. She had prayed to them so passionately that she could not understand why they had not answered. Still, she trusted them. She had told them she was angry, and that she thought them cruel for their delay; and in her heart she believed that they knew they had done wrong, and that the miracle would be wrought before too late. It was for mamma, not for herself. Madame must be swept like a snake out of the house, that mamma might no longer be pained in heaven. Personally, it made no difference whether she had to see madame at Lionnet or here at home, but it made all the difference to mamma, and that was all for which she cared.

Thinking these things, she met Mrs. Birkett midway on the lawn, the kind soul having come out to speak a soothing word before the poor child went in, to let her feel that she was sympathized with, not abandoned by them all. Fond as she was of madame, the new Mrs. Dundas, and little as she knew of Leam, the facts of the case were enough for her, and she saw Adelaide and herself in the child's sorrow and poor Pepita's successor. "My dear," she said affectionately as she met the girl walking so slowly up the lawn, "I dare say this is a trial to you, but you must accept it for your good. I know what you must feel, but it is better for you to have a good kind stepmother, who will be your friend and instructress, than to be left with no one to guide you."

Leam's sad face lifted itself up to the speaker. "It cannot be good for me if it is against mamma," she said.

"But, Leam, dear child, be reasonable. Your mamma, poor dear! is dead, and, let us trust, in heaven." The good soul's conscience pricked her when she said this glib formula, of which in this present instance she believed nothing. "Your father has the most perfect right to marry again. Neither the Church nor the Bible forbids it; and you cannot expect him to remain single all his life—when he needs a wife so much, too, on your account—because he was married to your dear mamma when she was alive. Besides, she has done with this life and all the things of the earth by now; and even if she has not, she will be happy to see you, her dear child, well cared for and kindly mothered."

Leam raised her eyes with sorrowful skepticism, melancholy contempt. It was the old note of war, and she responded to it. "I know mamma," she said: "I know what she is feeling."

She would have none of their spiritual thaumaturgy — none of that unreal kind of transformation with which they had tried to modify their first teaching. There was no satisfaction in imagining mamma something different from her former self— no more the real, fervid, passionate, jealous Pepita than those pear-shaped transparent bags, so logically constructed by Mrs. Corfield's philosopher, are like the ideal angels of loving fancy. If mamma saw and knew what was going on here at this present moment — and Mrs. Birkett was not the bold questioner to doubt this continuance of interest—she felt as she would have felt when alive, and she would be angry, jealous, weeping, unhappy.

Mrs. Birkett was puzzled what to say for the best to this uncomfortable fanatic, this unreasonable literalist. When believers have to formularize in set words their hazy notions of the feelings and conditions of souls in bliss, they make

but a lame business of it; and nothing that the dear woman could propound, keeping on the side of orthodox spirituality, carried comfort or conviction to Leam. Her one unalterable answer was always simply, "I know mamma: I know what she is feeling," and no argument could shake her from her point.

At last Mrs. Birkett gave up the contest. "Well, my child," she said, sighing, "I can only hope that the constant presence of your stepmother, her kindness and sweetness, will in time soften your feeling toward her."

Leam looked at her earnestly. "It is not for myself," she said: "it is for mamma."

And she said it with such pathetic sincerity, such an accent of deep love and self-abandonment to her cause, that the rector's wife felt her eyes filling up involuntarily with tears. Wrong-headed, dense, perverse as Leam was, her filial piety was at the least both touching and sincere, she said to herself, a pang passing through her heart. Adelaide would not speak of her if she were dead as this poor ignorant child spoke of her mother. Yet she had been to Adelaide all that the best and most affectionate kind of English mother can be, while Pepita had been a savage, now cruel and now fond; one day making her teeth meet in her child's arm, another day stifling her with caresses; treating her by times as a woman, by times as a toy, and never conscientious or judicious.

All the same, Leam's fidelity, if touching, was embarrassing as things were; so was her belief in the continued existence of her mother. But what can be done with those uncompromising reasoners who will carry their creeds straight to their ultimates, and will not be put off with eclectic compromises of this part known and that hidden—so much sure and so much vague? Mrs. Birkett determined that her husband should talk to the child and try to get a little common sense into her head, but she doubted the success of the process, perhaps because in her heart she doubted the skill of the operator.

By this time they reached the window, and the woman and the girl passed through into the room.

Mrs. Dundas came forward to meet her stepdaughter kindly — not warmly, not tumultuously—with her quiet, easy, waxen grace that never saw when things were wrong, and that always assumed the halcyon seas even in the teeth of a gale. For her greeting she bent forward to kiss the girl's face, saying, "My dear child, I am glad to see you," but Leam turned away her head.

"I am not glad to see you, and I will not kiss you," she said.

Her father frowned, his wife smiled. "You are right, my dear: it is a foolish habit," she said tranquilly, "but we are such slaves to silly habits," she added, looking at the rector and his wife in her pretty philosophizing way, while they smiled approvingly at her ready wit and serene good-temper.

"Will you say the same to me, Leam?" asked her father with an attempt at jocularity, advancing toward her.

"Yes," said Leam gravely, drawing back a step.

"Tell me, Mrs. Birkett, what can be done with such an impracticable creature?" cried Mr. Dundas.

"She will come right in time, dear husband," said the late marquise sweetly; and Mrs. Birkett echoed, looking at the girl kindly, "Oh yes, she will come right in time."

"If you mean by coming right, letting you be my mamma, I never will," cried Leam, fronting her stepmother.

"Silence, Leam!" cried Mr. Dundas angrily.

His wife laid her taper fingers tenderly on his. "No, no, dear husband: let her speak," she pleaded, her voice and manner admirably effective. "It is far better for her to say what she feels than to brood over it in silence. I can wait till she comes to me of her own accord and says, 'Mamma, I love you: forgive me the past.'"

"You are an angel," said Mr. Dundas, pressing her hand to his lips, his eyes moist and tender.

"I always said it," the rector added huskily—"the most noble-natured woman of my acquaintance."

"I never will come to you and say,

'Mamma, I love you,' and ask you to forgive me for being true to my own mamma," said Leam. "I am mamma's daughter, no other person's."

Mrs. Dundas smiled. "You will be mine, sweet child," she said.

How ugly Leam's persistent hate looked by the side of so much unwearied goodness! Even Mrs. Birkett, who pitied the poor child, thought her tenacity too morbid, too dreadful; and the rector honestly held her as one possessed, and regretted in his own mind that the Church had no formula for efficient exorcism. Believing, as he did, in the actuality of Satan, the theory of demoniacal possession came easy as the explanation of abnormal qualities.

Her father raged against himself in that he had given life to so much moral deformity. And yet it was not from him that she inherited "that cursed Spanish blood," he said, turning away with a groan, including Pepita, Leam, all his past with its ruined love and futile dreams, its hope and its despair, in that one bitter word.

"Don't say that, papa: mamma and I are true. It is you English that are bad and false," said Leam at bay.

Mrs. Dundas raised her hand. "Hush, hush, my child!" she said in a tone of gentle authority. "Say of me and to me what you like, but respect your father."

"Oh, Leam has never done that," cried Mr. Dundas with intense bitterness.

"No," said Leam, "I never have. You made mamma unhappy when she was alive: you are making her unhappy now. I love mamma: how can I love you?"

And then, her words realizing her thoughts in that she seemed to see her mother visibly before her, sorrowful and weeping while all this gladness was about in the place which had once been hers, and whence she was now thrust aside—these flowers of welcome, these smiling faces, this general content, she alone unhappy, she who had once been queen and mistress of all—the poor child's heart broke down, and she rushed from the room, too proud to let them see her cry, but too penetrated with anguish to restrain the tears.

"I am sure I don't know what on earth we can do with that girl," said Mr. Dundas with a dash of his old weak petulance, angry with circumstance and unable to dominate it—the weak petulance which had made Pepita despise him so heartily, and had winged so many of her shafts.

"Time and patience," said madame with her grand air of noble cheerfulness. But she had just a moment's paroxysm of dismay as she looked through the coming years, and thought of life shared between Leam's untamable hate and her husband's unmanly peevishness. For that instant it seemed to her that she had bought her personal ease and security at a high price.

As Leam went up stairs the door of her stepmother's room was standing open. The maid had unpacked the boxes most in request, and was now at tea in the servants' hall, telling of her adventures in Paris, where master and mistress had spent the honeymoon, and in her own way the heroine of the hour, like her betters in the parlor. The world seemed all wrong everywhere, life a cheat and love a torture, to Leam, as she stood within the open door, looking at the room which had been hers and her mother's, now transformed and appropriated to this stranger. She did not understand how papa could have done it. The room in which mamma had lived, the room in which she had died, the window from which she used to look, the very mirror that used to reflect back her beautiful and beloved face—ah, if it could only have kept what it reflected!—and papa to have given all this away to another woman! Poor mamma! no wonder she was unhappy. What could she, Leam, do to prevent all this wickedness if the blessed ones were idle and would not help her?

Her eyes fell on a bottle placed on the console where madame's night appliances were ranged—her night-light and the box of matches, her Bible and a hymn-book, a tablespoon, a carafe full of water and a tumbler, and this bottle marked "Cherry-water—one tablespoonful for a dose." In madame's hand-

writing underneath stood, "For my troublesome heart." Only about two tablespoonsful were left.

Leam took the bottle in one hand, the other thrust itself mechanically into her hair. No one was about, and the house was profoundly still, save for the voices coming up from the room below in a subdued and not unpleasant murmur, with now and then the child's shrill babble breaking in through the deeper tones like occasional notes in a sonata. Out of doors were all the pleasant sights and sounds of the peaceful evening coming on after the labors of the busy day. The birds were calling to each other in the woods before nesting for the night; the homing rooks flew round and round their trees, cawing loudly; the village dogs barked their welcome to their masters as they came off the fields and the day's work; and the setting sun dyed the autumn leaves a brighter gold, a deeper crimson, a richer russet. It was all so peaceful, all so happy, in this soft mild evening of the late September—all seemed so full of promise, so eloquent of future joy, to those who had just begun their new career.

But Leam knew nothing of the poetry of the moment—felt nothing of its pathetic irony in view of the deed she was half-unconsciously designing. She saw only, at first dimly, then distinctly, that here were the means by which mamma's enemy might be punished and swept from mamma's place, and that if she failed her opportunity now she would be a traitor and a coward, and would fail in her love and duty to mamma. No, she would not fail. Why should she? It was the way which the saints themselves had opened, the thing she had to do; and the sooner it was done the better for mamma.

She uncorked the bottle of cherry-water, good for that troublesome heart of poor madame's. All that Alick had told her of the action of poisons came back upon her as clearly as her mother's words, her mother's voice. This cherry-water, too, had the smell of bitter almonds, and was own sister to that in the little phial in her other hand. Now she understood it all—why she had been taken to Steel's Corner, why Alick had taught her about poisons, and why her mamma had told her to steal that bottle. She looked at it with its eloquent paper marked "Poison" wound about it spirally like a snake, uncorked it and emptied half into the cherry-water.

"Two drops are enough, and there are more than two there," she said to herself. "Mamma must be safe now." And with this she left the room and went into her own to watch and wait.

It was early to-night when Mrs. Dundas retired. There were certain things which she wanted to do on this her first night in her new home; and among them she wanted to put that green velvet pocket-book, gold embroidered, in some absolutely safe place, where it would not be seen by prying eyes or fall into dangerous hands. She did not intend to destroy its contents. She knew enough of the uncertainty of life to hold by all sorts of anchorages; and though things looked safe and sweet enough now, they might drift into the shallows again, and she wished her little Fina's future to be assured by one or other of those charged with it—if the stepfather failed, then to fall back on the father. Wherefore she elected to keep these papers in a safe place rather than destroy them, and the safest place she could think of was Pepita's jewel-case, now her own. It had a curious lock, which no other key than its own would fit—a lock that would have baffled even a "cracksman" and his whole bunch of skeleton keys.

In putting them away, obliged for the need of space to take off the paper wrappings, she was foolish enough to look at the photographs within—just one last look before banishing them for ever from her sight, as an honest wife should—and the sight of the handsome young face which she had loved sincerely in its day, and which was the face of her child's father, shook her nerves more than she liked them to be shaken. That troublesome heart of hers had begun to play her strange tricks of late with palpitation and irregularity. She could not afford that her nerve should fail her. That gone,

nothing would remain to her but a wreck. But her cherry-water was a pleasant and safe calmant, and she knew exactly how much to take.

Her maid saw nothing more to-night than she had seen on any other night of her service. Her mistress, if not quite so sweet to her as to Mrs. Birkett, say, or the rector, was yet fairly amiable as mistresses go, and to-night was neither better nor worse than ordinary. Her attendance went on in the usual routine, with nothing to remark, bad or good; and then madame laid her fair head on the pillow, and took a tablespoonful of her calmant to check the palpitation that had come on, and to still her nerves, which that last look backward had somewhat disturbed.

How beautiful she looked! Fair and lovely as she had always been to the eyes of Sebastian Dundas, never had she looked so grand as now. Her yellow hair was lying spread out on the pillow like a glory: one white arm was flung above her head, the other hung down from the bed. Her pale face, with her mouth half open as if in a smile at the happy things she dreamt, peaceful and pure as a saint's, seemed to him the very embodiment of all womanly truth and sweetness. He leaned over her with a yearning rapture that was almost ecstasy. This noble, loving woman was his own, his life, his future. No more dark moods of despair, no more angry passions, disappointment and remorse: all was to be cloudless sunshine, infinite delight, unending peace and love.

"My darling, oh my love!" he said tenderly, laying his hand on her glossy golden hair and kissing her. "Virginie, give me one word of love on your first night at home."

She was silent. Was her sleep so deep that even love could not awake her? He kissed her again and raised her head on his arm. It fell back without power, and then he saw that the half-opened mouth had a little froth clinging about the lips.

A cry rang through the house—cry on cry. The startled servants ran up trembling at they knew not what, to find their master clasping in his arms the fair dead body of his newly-married wife.

"Dead—she is dead," they passed in terrified whispers from each to each.

Leam, standing upright in her room, in her clinging white night-dress, her dark hair hanging to her knees, her small brown feet bare above the ankle—not trembling, but tense, listening, her heart on fire, her whole being as it were pressed together, and concentrated on the one thought, the one purpose—heard the words passed from lip to lip. "Dead," they said—"dead!"

Lifting up her rapt face and raising her outstretched arms high above her head, with no sense of sin, no consciousness of cruelty, only with the feeling of having done that thing which had been laid on her to do—of having satisfied and avenged her mother—she cried aloud in a voice deepened by the pathos of her love, the passion of her deed, into an exultant hymn of sacrifice, "Mamma, are you happy now? Mamma! mamma! leave off crying: there is no one in your place now."

PART VI.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHANGES.

FOUR years had come and gone since Mr. Dundas had laid his second wife in the grave beside his first, and the county had discussed the immorality of taking cherry-water as a calmant. For it was to an overdose of this that the verdict at the coroner's inquest had assigned the cause of poor madame's awful and sudden death; though why the medicine should have been found so loaded with prussic acid as to have caused instant death on this special night, when it had been taken so often before with impunity, was a mystery to which there was no solution. Not a trace of poison was to be found anywhere in the house, and no evidence was forthcoming to show how it might have been bought or where procured. Alick Corfield, who understood it all, was not called as a witness, and he told no one what he knew. On the contrary, he burdened his soul with the, to him, unpardonable crime of falsehood that he might shield Leam from detection; for when his father, missing the sixty-minim bottle of hydrocyanic acid, asked him what had become of it, Alick answered, with that wonderful coolness of virtue descending to sin for the protection of the beloved which is sometimes seen in the ingenuous, "I broke it by accident, father, and forgot to tell you."

As the boy had never been known to tell a falsehood in his life, he reaped the reward of good repute, and his father, saying quietly, "That was a bad job, my boy," laid the matter aside as a *caput mortuum* of no value.

To be sure, he thought more than once that it was an odd coincidence, but he could see no connection between the two circumstances of madame's sudden death and Alick's fracture of that bottle of hydrocyanic acid; and even if there should be any, he preferred not to trace it. So the inquest was a mere show so far as getting at the truth was concerned, and madame died and was buried in the mystery in which she had lived.

Meantime, Leam had been sent to school, whence she was expected to return a little more like other English girls than she had been hitherto, and Mr. Dundas shut up Ford House—he went back to the original name after madame's death—and left England to shake off in travel the deadly despair that had fallen like a sickness on him and taken all the flavor out of his life. He had never cared to search out the real history of that fair beloved woman. Enough had come to his knowledge, in the bills which had poured in from several Sherrington tradesmen on the announcement of her marriage and then of her death, to convince him that he had been duped in facts if not in feeling. For among these bills was one from the local geologist for "a beginner's cabinet of specimens," delivered just about the time when he, Sebastian, had spent so many pleasant hours in arranging the fragments which madame said represented both her knowledge and her lost happiness; also one from the fancy repository, which sold everything, for sundry water-color drawings and illuminated texts, a Table of the Ten Commandments illustrated, and the like, which sufficiently explained all on this side, and settled for ever the dead woman's claims to the artistic and scientific merit with which Mr. Dundas and the rector had credited her.

Also, certain ugly letters from a person of the name of Lowes, in London, put him on the track, had he cared to follow it up, of a deception even worse than that of pretended art or mock science. These letters, written in the same handwriting as that wherein Julius de Montfort, her brother-in-law, the present mar-

quis, had told her of the defalcations of the family solicitor and trustee, called Virginie, Madame la Marquise de Montfort, plain Susan bluntly, and reminded her of the screw that would be turned if the writer was not satisfied; and were letters that demanded money, always money, as the price of continued silence.

But Sebastian had loved his second wife too well to seek to know the truth, if that truth would be to her discredit. He preferred to be deceived; and he had what he preferred. He stifled all doubts, darkened all chinks by which the obtrusive light might penetrate, kept his love if not his faith unshaken, caring only to remember her as beautiful, seductive, soothing, and mourning her as deeply, doubtful as she had proved herself to be, as he had loved her fondly when he believed her honest. It was a curious mental condition for a man to cherish, but it satisfied him, and his regret was not robbed of its pathos by knowledge.

Now that the four years were completed, the widower had to return to his desolate home and make the best he could of the fragments of peace and happiness left to him. Leam was nineteen: it was time for her to be taken from school and given the protection of her father's house. It went against the man's heart to have her, but he was compelled, if he wished to stand well with his friends, and he hoped that the girl would be found improved from these years of discipline and training, and be rational and like other people. Wherefore he came home one dry dull day in October, and the neighborhood welcomed him, if not as their prodigal returned, yet as their lunatic restored to his right mind.

During these four years a few changes had taken place at North Aston. Carry Fairbairn had married—not Frank Harrowby: he had found a rich wife, not in the least to his personal taste, but greatly to his profit; and Carry, after having cried a good deal for a month, had consoled herself with a young clergyman from the North, whom she loved quite as much as if she had never fancied Frank at all, and spoilt in the first months by such submission as caused her to repent for all the years of her life after.

The things of the rectory were much in their old state. Little Fina, madame's child, was there under Mrs. Birkett's motherly care; but as the child was nearly six years old now, the good creature's instinctive love for infants was wearing out, and she was often heard to say how much she wished she could have kept Fina always a baby, and, sighing, how difficult she was to manage! She was an exceedingly pretty little girl, with fair skin, fair hair and dark eyes—willful of course, and spoilt of course; the only one in the house who took her in hand to correct being Adelaide. And as she took her in hand too smartly, Mrs. Birkett generally interfered, and the servants combined to screen her; the result being that the little one was mistress of the situation, after the manner of willful children, and made every one more or less anxious and uncomfortable as her return for their care.

Alick Corfield was the rector's curate. On the whole, this was the most important of all the North Aston events which had taken place during the last four years. Soon after madame's death and Leam's transfer from home to school Alick had a strange and sudden illness. No one knew what to make of it, nor how it came, nor what it was, but the doctor called it cerebral fever, and when the families got hold of the word they were content. Cerebral fever does as well as anything else for an illness of which no one knows and no one seeks to know the cause, and to the origin of which the patient himself gives no clew. It was a peg, and a peg was all that was wanted.

On his recovery he announced his intention of going to Oxford to read for holy orders. His mother was piteously distressed, as might be expected. She feared all sorts of evil for her boy, from damp sheets and unmended linen to over-study, wine-parties and bold-faced minxes weaving subtle webs of fascination. But for the first time in his life Alick stood out against her insistance,

and his will conquered hers. The sequel of the struggle was, that he went to Oxford, took his degree, read for orders, passed, and that Mr. Birkett gave him his title as his curate.

It could hardly be said that the relations were entirely harmonious between the military-minded rector, who held to the righteousness of helotry and the value of ignorance in the class beneath him, and the young curate burning with zeal and oppressed with the desire to put all the crooked things of life straight. The one pooh-poohed the enthusiasm of the other, derided his belief in humanity and assured him of failure: the other felt as if he had been taken behind the scenes and shown the blue fire of which the awful lightning of his youth was made. Mr. Birkett could not quite forbid the greater faith, the more loving endeavor which the young man threw into his ministrations, but he was the Sadducee who scoffed and made the work heavy and uphill throughout. He gave a grudging assent to the Bible-classes, the Wednesday evening services at the Sunday-school, the lectures on great men on the first Monday in the month, which Alick proposed and established. He thought it all weariness to the flesh and a waste of time and energy; but the traditions of his order were strong, if he himself did not share them, and he had to give way in the end. He consoled himself with the reflection that the boy would find out his mistake before long, and that then he would know who had been right throughout.

But even zeal and hope and diligence in his work could not lighten the persistent sadness which was Alick's chief characteristic now. Gaunt and silent, with the eyes of a man whose inner self is absent and whose thoughts are not with his company, he looked as if he had passed through the fire, and had not passed through unscathed. No one knew what had happened to him, and, though many made conjectures, none came near the truth. Meanwhile, he seemed as if he lived only to work, and, the clearer-sighted might have added, to wait.

For a further local change, Lionnet was tenanted again by a strange and solitary man, who never went to church and did not visit in the neighborhood. He was in consequence believed to be a forger, an escaped convict in hiding, or, by the more charitable, a maniac as yet not dangerous. North Aston held him in deeper horror than it had held even Pepita, and his true personality exercised its wits more keenly than had even the true personality of madame. In point of fact, he was a quiet, inoffensive, amiable man, who gave his mind to Sanskrit for work and to entomology for play, and did not trouble himself about his own portrait as drawn in the local vernacular. Nevertheless, for all his reserved habits and quiet ways, he had learnt the whole history of the place and people before he had been at Lionnet a month.

At the Hill things remained unchanged for the ladies, save for the additional burden of years and the pleasant news that Edgar was expected home daily. Adelaide, now twenty-four, took the news as a personal grace, and blossomed into smiles and glad humor of which only Josephine understood the source. But Josephine held her tongue, and received the confidence of her young friend with discretion. As she had never dispossessed her own old idol, she could feel for Adelaide, and she was not disposed to look on her patient determination with displeasure. The constancy of the two, however, was very different in essential meaning. With Josephine it was the constancy that is born of an affectionate disposition and the absence of rival Lotharios: with Adelaide it was the result of calculation and decision. The one would have worshiped Sebastian as she worshiped him now had he been ruined, a cripple, a criminal even: the other would have shut out Edgar inexorably from her very dreams had not his personality included the Hill. With the one it was self-abasement—with the other self-consideration; but it came to the same thing in the end, and the men profited equally.

All these changes Sebastian Dundas found to have taken place when he re-

turned to North Aston with gray hair instead of brown, his smooth, fair skin tanned and roughened, and his weak, finely-cut, effeminate mouth hidden by a moustache of a reddish tint, mingled with white. Still, he was Sebastian; and after the first shock of his altered appearance had been got over, Josephine carried her incense in the old way, and found her worship as dear and as tantalizing as ever.

Lastly, as the crowning change of all, Leam came home from school; no longer the arrogant, embittered child, looking at life through the false medium of pride and ignorance, saying rude things and doing odd ones with the most perfect unconsciousness; but well-bred, graceful, sufficiently instructed not to make patent mistakes, and more beautiful by far than she had even promised to be. Her very eyes were lovelier, lovely as they had always been: they had more variety of expression, were more dewy and tender, and, if less tragic, were more spiritual. That hard, dry, burning passion which had devoured her of old time seemed to have gone, as also her savage Spanish pride. She had rounded and softened in body too, as in mind. Her skin was fairer; her lips were not so firmly closed, so rigid in line, so constricted in motion; her brows were more flexible and not so often knit together; and her slight, lithe figure was perfect in line and movement. Still, she had enough of her former manner of being for identity. Grave, quiet, laconic, direct, she was but a modification of the former Leam as they had known her—Leam, Pepita's daughter, and with blood in her veins that was not the ordinary blood of the ordinary British miss.

Her father's artistic perceptions were gratified as he met her at the station and Leam turned her cheek to him voluntarily with tears in her eyes. Turning her cheek was apparently her idea of kissing; but if not too intense an expression of affection, it was at least an improvement on the old hard repulsion, and Sebastian accepted it as the concession it was meant to be. Indeed, they met somewhat as foes reconciled, or rather seeking to be reconciled, and Mr. Dundas did not wish to keep open old sores. Her cheek, turned to him somewhere about the ear, represented to his mind a peace-offering: her eyes full of tears were as a confession of past sins and a promise of amendment. Not that he understood why she was so much more effusive than of old, but if it augured a happier life together, he was glad.

As they drove up to the door of the old home, crowded with memories and associations, a shudder passed over the girl: she grasped her father's hand in her own almost convulsively, and he heard her say below her breath, "Poor papa!"

He wondered why she pitied him. The place must surely be full of memories of her mother for her: why did she say "Poor papa!" to him? He did not see what she saw—that peaceful September evening, and the bottle of cherry-water on the table, with the little phial of thirty deaths in her hand; and now the contents emptied into the harmless draught; and now madame pale and dead. The whole scene transacted itself vividly before her, and she shuddered at her memories and her past self, as always with a kind of vague wonder how she could have been so wicked, and where did she get the force, the courage, for such a cruel crime?

For all these four years at school the shadow of that dreadful deed had been ever in the background of her life; and as time went on, and she came to a better understanding of morality, it grew clear to her as a crime. Its consciousness of guilt had broken down her pride, and thus had made her more malleable, more humble. She could no longer harden herself in her belief that she was superior to every one else. Those girls, her companions—they had not had an Andalusian mother, truly; they did not pray to the saints, and the Holy Virgin took no care of them; they were Protestants and English, frogs and pigs; but they had not committed murder. If she should stand up in the middle of the room and tell them what she had done, which of them would touch her hand

again? which of them speak to her? English and Protestants as they were, how far superior in their innocence to her, an Andalusian Catholic, in her guilt! But no one lives with remorse. It comes and goes gustily, fitfully; but the things of the present are stronger than the things of the past, else the man with a shameful secret in his life would go mad.

One of these gusty storms broke over Leam as she passed through the gates of the old home, and for the moment she felt as if she must confess the truth to her father and tell him what evil thing she had done. Yet it passed, as other such storms had passed: the things of the present took their natural place of prominence, and those of the past sank again into the background, shadows that never faded quite away, but that were not actualities pressing against her.

The news of Leam's home-coming created quite a pleasurable excitement in the neighborhood, and the families flocked to Ford House to welcome her among them as one of themselves, all anxious to see if the Ethiopian of North Aston had shed her skin, if the leopardess had changed her spots. They were divided among themselves as to whether she had or had not. Some said she was charming, and like any one else, but others shook their heads, and, like experts in brain disease, professed to see traces of the old lunacy, and to be doubtful as to her cure. At the worst, however, here she was—one of themselves whom they must receive; and common sense dictated that they should make the best of her, and hope all things till they proved some.

There was one among them whom Leam longed yet dreaded to meet. This was Alick Corfield. She wondered what he knew, or rather what he suspected, and she was anxious to have her ordeal over. But, though Mrs. Corfield came, and was just the same as ever, bustling, inquisitive, dogmatic, before ten minutes were over having put the girl through her scholastic facings and got from her the whole of her curriculum, yet Alick did not appear. He waited until after Sunday, when he should see her first in church, and so nerve himself as it were behind the barrier of his sacred office; but after Sunday had passed and he had seen her in her old place, he called, and found her alone.

When they met, and she looked into his face and laid her hand in his, she knew all. He shared her secret, and knew what she had done. It was not that he was either distant or familiar, cold or disrespectful, or anything but glad and reverent; nevertheless, he knew. He was no longer the boy adorer, her slave, her dog: he was her friend, and he wished to make her feel that she was safe with him—known, in his power, but safe.

"You are changed," he said awkwardly.

He thought of her as Leam, heard her always called Leam, but he dared not use the familiar name, and yet she was not "Miss Dundas" to him.

"It is four years since you saw me," she said with a grave smile. "It was time to change."

"But you are your old self too," he returned eagerly. He would have no disloyalty done to the queen of his boyish dreams: what worm soever was at its root, his royal pomegranate flower should be always set fair in the sun where he might be.

"You seem much changed too," she said after a short pause—"graver and older. Is that because you are a clergyman?"

Alick turned his eyes away from the girl's face, and looked mournfully out on to the autumn woods. "Partly," he said.

"And the other part?" asked Leam, pressing to know the worst.

"And the other part?" He looked at her, and his wan face grew paler. "Well, never mind the other part. There are things which sometimes come into a man's life and wither it for ever, as a fire passing over a green tree, but we do not speak of them."

"To no one?"

"To no one."

Leam sighed. No proclamation could have made the thing clearer between

them. Henceforth she was in Alick's power: let him be faithful, chivalrous, loyal, devoted, what you will, she was no longer her own unshared property. He knew what she was, and in so far was her master.

Poor Alick! This was not the light in which he held his fatal secret. True, he knew what she had done, and that his young queen, his ideal, was a murderess, who, if the truth were made public, would be degraded below the level of the poorest wretch that had kept an honest name; but he felt himself more accursed than she, in that he had been the means whereby she had gotten both her knowledge and the power to use it. He was the doomed if innocent, as of old tragic times—the sinless Cain guilty of murder, but guiltless in intent. It was for this, as much as for the love and poetry of the boyish days, that he felt he owed himself to Leam—that his life was hers, and all his energies were to be devoted for her good. It was for this that he had prayed with such intensity of earnestness it seemed to him sometimes as if his soul had left his body, and had gone up to the Most High to pluck by force of passionate entreaty the pardon he besought: "Pardon her, O Lord! Turn her heart, enlighten her understanding, convince her of her sin; but pardon her, pardon her, dear Lord! And with her, pardon me."

The man's whole life was spent in this one wild, fervid prayer. All that he did was tinged with the sentiment of winning grace for her and pardon for both. In his own mind they stood hand in hand together; and if he was the intercessor, they were both to benefit, and neither would be saved without the other. And he believed in the value of his prayers and in the objective reality of their influence.

For the final changes in the ordering of home and society at North Aston, the week after Leam returned Edgar Harrowby came from India, and took up his position as the owner of the Hill estate; and the child Fina was brought to Ford House, and formally invested with her new name and condition as Miss Fina Dundas, Sebastian's younger daughter. Mindful of the past, Mr. Dundas expected to have a stormy scene with Leam when he told her his intentions respecting poor madame's child; but Leam answered quietly, "Very well, papa," and greeted Fina when she arrived benevolently, if not effusively. She was not one of those born mothers who love babies from their early nursery days, but she was kind to the child in her grave way, and seemed anxious to do well by her.

The ladies all bestowed on her their nursery recipes and systems in rich abundance—especially Mrs. Birkett, who, though glad to be relieved from the hourly task of watching and contending, was still immensely interested in the little creature, and gave daily counsel and superintendence. So that on the whole Leam was not left unaided with her charge. On the contrary, she ran great risk of being bewildered by her multiplicity of counselors, and of entering in consequence on that zigzag course which covers much ground and makes but little progress.

CHAPTER XXII.

EDGAR HARROWBY.

THIRTY-TWO years of age; tall, handsome, well set-up, and every inch a soldier; manly in bearing, but also with that grace of gesture and softness of speech which goes by the name of polished manner; a bold sportsman, ignorant of physical fear, to whom England was the culmination of the universe, and such men as he—gentlemen, officers, squires—the culmination of humanity; a man who loved women as creatures, but despised them as intelligences; who respected socially the ladies of his own class, and demanded that they should be without stain, as befits the wives and mothers and sisters of gentlemen, but who thought women of a meaner grade fair game for the roving fowler; a conservative, holding to elemental differences whence arise the value of races, the dignity of family and the righteousness of caste; an he-

reditary landowner, regarding landed property as a sacred possession meant only for the few and not to be suffered to lapse into low-born hands; a gentleman, incapable of falsehood, treachery, meanness, social dishonor, but not incapable of injustice, tyranny, selfishness, even cruelty, if such came in his way as the privilege of his rank,—this was Edgar Harrowby as the world saw and his friends knew him, and as North Aston had henceforth to know him.

His return caused immense local excitement and great rejoicing. It seemed to set the social barometer at "fair," and to promise a spell of animation such as North Aston had been long wanting. And indeed personally for himself it was time that Major Harrowby was at home and at the head of his own affairs. Matters had been going rather badly on the estate without him, and the need of a strong hand to keep agents straight and tenants up to the mark had been making itself somewhat disastrously felt during the last three or four years. Wherefore he had sold out, broken all his ties in India handsomely, as he had broken them in London handsomely once before, when, mad with jealousy, he had fled like a thief in the night, burned his boats behind him, and, as he thought, obliterated every trace by which that loved and graceless woman could discover his real name or family holding; and now had come home prepared to do his duty to society and himself. That is, prepared to marry a nice girl of his own kind, keep the estate well in hand, and set an example of respectability and orthodoxy, family prayers and bold riding, according to the ideal of the English country gentleman.

But, above all, he must marry. And the wife provided for him by the eternal fitness of things was Adelaide Birkett. Who else could be found to suit the part so perfectly? She was well-born, well-mannered; though not coarsely robust, yet healthy in the sense of purity of blood; and she was decidedly pretty. So far to the good of the Harrowby stock in the future. Neither was she too young, though by reason of her quiet country life her twenty-four years did not count more to her in wear and tear of feeling and the doubtful moulding of experience than if she had lived through one London season. She was a girl of acknowledged good sense, calm, equable, holding herself in the strictest leash of ladylike reserve, and governing all her emotions without trouble, patent or unconfessed. Hers was a character which would never floreate into irregular beauties to give her friends anxiety and crowd her life with embarrassing consequences. She despised sentiment and ridiculed enthusiasm, thought skepticism both wicked and disreputable, but at the same time fanaticism was silly, and not nearly so respectable as that quiet, easy-going religion which does nothing of which society would disapprove, but does not break its heart in trying to found the kingdom of God on earth.

All her relations with life and society would be blameless, orthodox, ladylike and thoroughly English. As a wife she would preach submission in public and practice domination and the moral repression belonging to the superior being in private. As a mother she would take care to have experienced nurses and well-bred governesses, who would look after the children properly, when she would wash her hands of further trouble and responsibility, save to teach them good manners at luncheon and self-control in their evening visit to the drawing-room for the "children's half hour" before dinner. As the mistress of an establishment she would be strict, demanding perfect purity in the morals of her servants, not suffering waste, nor followers, nor kitchen amusements that she knew of, nor kitchen individuality anyhow. Her servants would be her serfs, and she would assume to have bought them by food and wages in soul as well as body, in mind as well as muscle. She would give broken meat in moderation to the deserving poor, but she would let those who are not deserving do the best they could with want at home and inclemency abroad; and she would have called it fostering vice had she fed the husbandless mother when hungry or clothed the drunkard's chil-

dren when naked. She would never be talked about for extremes or eccentricities of any kind; and the world would be forced to mention her with respect when it mentioned her at all, having indeed no desire to do otherwise. For she was of the kind dear to the heart of England — one of those who are called the salt of the earth, and who are assumed to keep society safe and pure. She was incredulous of science, contemptuous of superstition, impatient of new ideas—appreciating art, but holding artists as inferior creatures, like actors, acrobats and newspaper writers. She was loyal to the queen and royal family, the nobility and Established Church, bracketing republicans with atheists, and both with unpunished felons; as also classing immorality, the facts of physiology and the details of disease in a group together, as things horrible and not to be spoken of before ladies. She was not slow to believe evil of her neighbors, maintaining, indeed, that to be spoken of at all was proof sufficient of undesirable conduct; but she would never investigate a charge, preferring rather to accept it in its vile integrity than to soil her hands by attempting to unweave its dirty threads; hence she would be pitiless, repellent, but she would never make herself the focus of gossip. She was a human being if you will, a Christian in creed and name assuredly; but beyond and above all things she was a well-mannered, well-conducted English lady, a person of spotless morals and exquisite propriety, in the presence of whom humanity must not be human, truth truthful, nor Nature natural.

This was the wife for Edgar Harrowby as a country gentleman—the woman whom Mrs. Harrowby would have chosen out of thousands to be her daughter-in-law, whom his sisters would like, who would do credit to his name and position; and whom he himself would find as good for his purpose as any within the four seas.

For when Edgar married he would marry on social and rational grounds: he would not commit the mistake of fancying that he need love the woman as he had loved some others. He would marry her, whoever she might be, because she would be of a good family and reasonable character, fairly handsome, unexceptionable in conduct, not tainted with hereditary disease nor disgraced by ragged relatives, having nothing to do with vice or poverty in the remotest link of her connections—a woman fit to be the keeper of his house, the bearer of his name, the mother of his children. But for love, passion, enthusiasm, sentiment—Edgar thought all such emotional impedimenta as these not only superfluous, but oftentimes disastrous in the grave campaign of matrimony.

It was for this marriage that Adelaide had saved herself. She believed that any woman can marry any man if she only wills to do so; and from the day when she was seventeen, and they had had a picnic at Dunaston, she had made up her mind to marry Edgar Harrowby. When he came home for good, unmarried and unengaged, she knew that she should succeed; and Edgar knew it too. He knew it so well after he had been at home about a week that if anything could have turned him against the wife carved out for him by circumstance and fitness, it would have been the almost fatal character of that fitness, as if Fortune had not left him a choice in the matter.

"And what do you think of Adelaide?" asked Mrs. Harrowby one day when her son said that he had been to the rectory. "You have seen her twice now: what is your impression of her?"

"She is prettier than ever—improved, I should say, all through," was his answer.

Mrs. Harrowby smiled. "She is a girl I like," she said. "She is so sensible and has such nice feeling about things."

"Yes," answered Edgar, "she is thoroughly well-bred."

"We have seen a great deal of her of late years," Mrs. Harrowby continued, angling dexterously. "She and the girls are fast friends, especially she and Josephine, though there is certainly some slight difference of age between them. But Adelaide prefers their society to that of any one about the neighborhood. And

I think that of itself shows such good taste and nice feeling."

"So it does," said Edgar with dutiful assent, not exactly seeing for himself what constituted Adelaide's good taste and nice feeling in this preference for his dull and doleful sisters over the brighter companionship of the Fairbairns, say, or any other of the local nymphs. To him those elderly maiden sisters of his were rather bores than otherwise, but he was not displeased that Adelaide Birkett thought differently. If it "ever came to anything," it would be better that they satisfied her than that she should find them uncongenial.

"She is coming up to dinner this evening," Mrs. Harrowby went on to say; and Edgar smiled, pulled his moustaches and looked half puzzled if wholly pleased.

"She is a pretty girl," he said with the imbecility of a man who ought to speak and who has nothing to say, also who has something that he does not wish to say.

"She is better than pretty—she is good," returned Mrs. Harrowby; and Edgar, not caring to discuss Adelaide on closer ground with his mother, strolled away into his private room, where he sat before the fire smoking, meditating on his life in the past and his prospects in the future, and wondering how he would like it when he had finally abjured the freedom of bachelorhood and had taken up with matrimony and squiredom for the remainder of his natural life.

Punctually at seven Adelaide Birkett appeared. This, too, was one of her minor virtues: she was exact. Mind, person, habits, all were regulated with the nicest method, and she knew as little of hurry as of delay, and as little of both as of passion.

"You are such a dear, good punctual girl!" said Josephine affectionately—Josephine, whose virtues had a few more loose ends and knots untied than had her friend's.

"It is so vulgar to be unpunctual," said Adelaide with her calm good-breeding. "It seems to me only another form of uncleanliness and disorder."

"And Edgar is so punctual too!" cried Josephine by way of commentary.

Adelaide smiled, not broadly, not hilariously, only to the exact shade demanded by conversational sympathy. "Then we shall agree in this," she said quietly.

"Oh I am sure you will agree, and in more than this," Josephine returned, almost with enthusiasm.

Had she not been the willing nurse of this affair from the beginning?—if not the open confidante, yet secretly holding the key to her younger friend's mind and actions? and was she not, like all the kindly disappointed, intensely sympathetic with love-matters, whether wise or foolish, hopeful or hopeless?

"Who is it that you are sure will agree with Miss Adelaide, if any one indeed could be found to disagree with her?" asked Edgar, standing in the doorway.

Josephine laughed with the silliness of a weak woman "caught." She looked at Adelaide slyly. Adelaide turned her quiet face, unflushed, unruffled, and neither laughed sillily nor looked slyly.

"She was praising me for punctuality; and then she said that you were punctual too," she explained cheerfully.

"We learn that in the army," said Edgar.

"But I have had to learn it without the army," she answered.

"Which shows that you have by the grace of nature what I have attained only by discipline and art," said Edgar gallantly.

Adelaide smiled. She did not disdain the compliment. On the contrary, she wished to impress it on Edgar that she accepted his praises because they were her due. She knew that the world takes us if not quite at our own valuation, yet as being the character we assume to be. It all depends on our choice of a mask and to what ideal self we dress. If we are clever and dress in keeping, without showing chinks or discrepancies, no one will find out that it is only a mask; and those of us are most successful in gaining the good-will of our fellows who understand this principle the most clearly and act on it the most consistently.

The evening was a pleasant one for Adelaide, being an earnest of the future

for which, if she had not worked hard, she had controlled much. Edgar sang solos to her accompaniment, and put in his rich baritone to her pure if feeble soprano; he played chess with her for an hour, and praised her play, as it deserved: naturally, not thinking it necessary to make love to his sisters, he paid her almost exclusive attention, and looked the admiration he felt. She really was a very pretty young woman, and she had unexceptionable manners; and having cut himself adrift from his ties and handsomely released himself from his obligations, he was not disposed to take much trouble in looking far afield for a wife when here was one ready-made to his hand. Still, he was not so rash as to commit himself too soon. Fine play is never precipitate; and even the most lordly lover, if an English gentleman, thinks it seemly to pretend to woo the woman whom he means to take, and who he knows will yield.

And on her side Adelaide was too well-bred for the one part, and too wise for the other, to clutch prematurely at the prize she had willed should be hers. Her actions must be like her gestures, graceful, rhythmic, rather slow than hurried, and bearing the stamp of purpose and deliberation. When Edgar should make his offer, as she knew he would, she would ask for time to reflect and make up her mind. This would be doing the thing properly and with due regard to her own dignity; for no husband of hers should ever have cause to think that she held her marriage with him as a thing so undeniably advantageous there was no doubt of her acceptance from the first. Every woman must make herself difficult, thought Adelaide, if she wishes to be prized, even the woman who for seven years has fixed her eyes steadily on one point, and has determined that she will finally capture a certain man and land him as her lifelong possession.

Thus the evening passed, with a subtle undercurrent of concealed resolves flowing beneath its surface admiration that gave it a peculiar charm to the two people principally concerned—the one feeling that she had advanced her game by an important move; the other, that the eternal fitness of things was making itself more and more evident, and that it was manifest to all his senses whom Providence had destined for his wife, and for what ultimate matrimonial end he had been shaped and spared.

A book of photographs was on the table.

"Are you here?" asked Edgar, lowering his bright blue eyes on Adelaide as she sat on a small chair at Mrs. Harrowby's feet, carrying daughterly incense to that withered shrine.

"Yes, I think so," she answered.

He turned the pages carefully—passing over his sisters in wide crinolines and spoon bonnets; his mother, photographed from an old picture, in a low dress and long dropping bands of hair, like a mouflon's ears, about her face; Fred and himself, both as boys in Scotch suits, set stiffly against the table like dolls—with gradual improvement in art and style, till he came to a page where Adelaide's fair vignetted head of large size was placed side by side with another, also vignetted and also large.

"Ah! there you are; and what a capital likeness!" cried Edgar, with the joyous look and accent of one meeting an old friend, giving that gauge of interest which we all unconsciously give when we first see the photograph of a well-known face. He looked at the portrait long and critically. "Only not so pretty," he added gallantly. "Those fellows cannot catch the spirit: they give only the outside forms, and not always these correctly. Here is a striking face," he continued, pointing to Adelaide's companion-picture—a girl with masses of dark hair, dark eyes, large, mournful, heavily fringed with long lashes, and a grave, sad face, that seemed listening rather than looking. "Who is she? She looks foreign."

Adelaide glanced at the page, as if she did not know it by heart. "That? Oh! that is only Leam Dundas," she said with the faintest, finest flavor of scorn in her voice.

"Leam Dundas?" repeated Edgar—"the daughter of that awful woman?"

"Yes, and nearly as odd as the mother," answered Adelaide, still in the same cold manner and with the same accent of superior scorn.

"At least she used to be, you mean, dear, but she is more like other people now," said kindly Josephine, more just than politic.

Adelaide looked at her calmly, indifferently. "Yes, I suppose she is rather less savage than of old," was her reply, "but I do not see much of her."

"I do not remember to have ever seen her: she must have been a mere child when I was here last," said Edgar.

"She is nineteen now, I think," said Mrs. Harrowby.

"Not more?" repeated Adelaide. "I imagined she was one-and-twenty at the least. She looks so very much older than even this—five or six and twenty, full: dark people age so quickly."

"She seems to be superbly handsome," Edgar said, still looking at the portrait.

"For those who like that swarthy kind of beauty. For myself, I do not: it always reminds me of negroes and Lascars."

Adelaide leaned forward, and made pretence to examine Leam's portrait with critical independence of judgment. She spoke as if this was the first time she had seen it, and her words the thought of the moment resulting.

"There is no negroid taint here," Edgar answered gravely. "It is the face of a sibyl, of a tragedian."

"Do you think so? It is fine in outline certainly, but too monotonous to please me, and too lugubrious; and the funny part of it is, there is nothing in her. She looks like a sibyl, but she is the most profoundly stupid person you can imagine."

"Not now, Addy: she has wakened up a good deal," again interposed Josephine with her love of justice and want of tact.

"But do you not see the mother in her, Josephine? I do, painfully; and the mother was such a horror! Leam is just like her. She will grow her exact counterpart."

"A bad model enough," said Edgar; "but this face is not bad. It has more in it than poor old Pepita's. How fat she was!"

"So will Leam be when she is as old," said Adelaide quietly. "And do you think these dark people ever look clean? I don't."

"That is a drawback certainly," laughed Edgar, running through the remainder of the book.

But he turned back again to the page which held Leam and Adelaide side by side, and he spoke of the latter while he looked at the former. The face of Leam Dundas, mournful, passionate, concentrated as it was, had struck his imagination—struck it as none other had done since the time when he had met that grand and graceful woman wandering, lost in a fog, in St. James's Park, and had protected from possible annoyance till he had landed her in St. John's Wood. He was glad that Leam Dundas lived in North Aston, and that he should see her without trouble or overt action; and as he handed Adelaide into her carriage he noticed for the first time that her blue eyes were not quite even, that her flaxen hair had not quite enough color, and that her face, if pure and fair, was slightly insipid.

"Poor, dear Adelaide!" he said when he returned to the drawing-room, "how nice she is! but how tart she was about this Leam Dundas of yours! Looks like jealousy; and very likely is. All you women are so horribly jealous."

"Not all of us," said Maria hastily.

"And I do not think that Adelaide is," said Josephine. "She has no cause; for though Leam is certainly very lovely, and seems to have improved immensely for being at school, still she and Addy do not come into collision any way, and I do not see why she should be jealous."

"Perhaps Edgar admired her photograph too much," said Fanny, who was the stupid one of the three, but on occasions made the shrewdest remarks.

Edgar laughed, not displeasedly. "That would be paying me too high a compliment," he said.

Whereat his three sisters echoed "Compliment!" in various tones of deprecation,

and Josephine added a meaning little laugh for her own share, for which Edgar gave her a kiss, and said in a bantering kind of voice, "Now, Joseph! mind what you are about!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE MOOR.

It was a gray and gusty day in November, with heavy masses of low-lying clouds rolling tumultuously overhead, and a general look of damp and decay about the fields and banks—one of those melancholy days of the late autumn which make one long for the more varied circumstances of confessed winter, when the deep blue shadows in the crisp snow suggest the glory of southern skies, and the sparkle of the sun on the delicate tracery of the frosted branches has a mimicry of life, such as we imagine strange elves and fairies might create.

There was no point of color in the landscape save the brown foliage of the shivering beech trees, a few coarse splashes of yellow weeds, and here and there a trail of dying crimson leaves threading the barren hedgerows. Everything was sombre, lifeless, mournful, and even Edgar Harrowby, though by no means sentimentally impressionable to outward conditions, felt, as he rode through the deserted lanes and looked abroad over the stagnant country, that life on the off-hunt days was but a slow kind of thing at North Aston, and that any incident which should break the dead monotony of the scene would be welcome.

He had been thinking a great deal of Adelaide for the last four or five days, since she had dined at the Hill, and making up his mind to take the final plunge before long. He was not in love with her, but she suited, as has been said; and that was as good as love to Edgar, who had now to take up his squiredom and country gentleman's respectability, after having had his share of a young man's "fling" in rather larger proportion than falls to the lot of most. All the same, he wished that her face had more expression and that her eyes were perfectly straight; and he wanted to see Leam Dundas.

He had made a long round to-day, and was turning now homeward, when, as he had almost crossed the moor, athwart which his road led, he saw standing on a little hillock, away from the main track, the slight figure of a woman sharply defined against the sky. She was alone, doing nothing, not seeming to be looking at anything—just standing there on the hillock, facing the north-west, as if for pleasure in the rough freshness of the breeze.

The wind blew back her dress, and showed her girlish form, supple, flexible, graceful, fashioned like some nymph of olden time. From her small feet, arched and narrow, gripping the ground like feet of steel, to the slender throat on which her head was set with so much grace of line, yet with no sense of overweighting in its tender curves, an expression of nervous energy underlying her fragile litheness of form, a look of strength—not muscular nor the strength of bulk or weight, but the strength of fibre, will, tenacity—seemed to mark her out as something different from the herd.

Edgar scarcely gave this vague impression words in his own mind, but he was conscious of a new revelation of womanhood, and he scented an adventure in this solitary figure facing the north-west wind on the lonely moor.

Her very dress, too, had a character of its own in harmony with the rest—black all through, save for the scarlet feather in her hat, which burnt like a flame against the gray background of the sky; and her whole attitude had something of defiance in its profound stillness, while standing so boldly against the strong blasts that swept across the heights, which caught his imagination, at that moment ready to be inflamed. All things depend on times and moods, and Edgar's mood at this moment of first seeing Leam Dundas was favorable for the reception of new impressions.

For, of course, it was Leam—Leam, who, since her return from school, alone and without companionship, was feverish

often, and often impelled to escape into the open country from something that oppressed her down in the valley too painfully to be borne. She had never been a confidential nor an expansive schoolfellow; not even an affectionate one as girls count affection, seeing that she neither kissed nor cried, nor quarreled nor made up—neither stood as a model of fidelity nor changed her girl-lovers in anticipation of future inconstancies—writing a love-letter to Ada to-day and a copy of verses to Ethel to-morrow—but had kept with all the same quiet gravity and gentle reticence which seemed to watch rather than share, and to be more careful not to offend than solicitous to win.

All the same, she missed her former comrades now that she had lost them; but most of all she missed the wholesome occupation and mental employment of her studies. Left as she was to herself, thoughts and memories were gathering up from the background where they had lain dormant if extant all these years, and through her solitude were getting a vitality which made her stand still in a kind of breathless agony, wondering where they would lead her and in what they would end. At times such a burning sense of sin would flash over her that she felt as if she must confess that hideous fact of her girlish past. It seemed so shameful that she should be living there among the rest, a criminal with the innocent, and not tell them what she was. Then the instinct of self-preservation would carry it over her conscience, and she would press back her thoughts and go out, as to-day, to cool her feverish blood, and grow calm to bear and strong to hold the heavy burden which she had fashioned by her own mad deed and laid for life on her own hands.

If only the ladies had not insisted so strongly on mamma's personality in heaven! if only they had not lighted up her imagination, her loyalty, by this tremendous torch of faith and love! How bitterly she regretted the childish fanaticism which had made her imagine herself the providence of that beloved memory, the avenger of those shadowy wrongs! Oh, if she could undo the past and call madame back to life! She would kiss her now, and even call her mamma if it would please her and papa. So she stood on the hillock facing the north-west, thinking these things and regretting in vain.

As Edgar came riding by his large black hound dashed off to Leam and barked furiously, all four paws planted on the ground as if preparing for a spring. The beast had probably no malice, and might have meant it merely as his method of saying, "Who are you?" but he looked formidable, and Leam started back and cried, "Down, dog! go away!" in a voice half angry and half afraid.

Then Edgar saw the face, and knew who she was. He rode across the turf, calling off his dog, and came up to her. It was an opportunity, and Edgar Harrowby was a man who knew how to take advantage of opportunities. It was in his creed to thank Providence for favorable chances by making the most of them, and this was a chance of which it would be manifestly ungrateful not to make the most. It was far more picturesque to meet her for the first time, as now, on the wild moor on a gusty gray November day, than in the gloomy old drawing-room at the Hill. It gave a flavor of romance and the forbidden which was not without its value in the beginning of an acquaintance with such a face as Leam's. Nevertheless, in spite of the romance that hung about the circumstance, his first words were commonplace enough. "I hope my dog has not alarmed you?" he said, lifting his hat.

Leam looked at him with those wonderful eyes of hers, that seemed somehow to look through him. She, standing on her hillock, was slightly higher than Edgar sitting on his horse; and her head was bent as she looked down on him, giving her attitude and gesture something of a dignified assumption of superiority, more like the Leam of the past than of the present. "No, I was not alarmed," she said. "But I do not like to be barked at," she added, an echo of the old childish sense of injury from cir-

cumstance that was so quaint and pretty in her half-complaining voice.

"I suppose not: how should you?" answered Edgar with sympathetic energy. "Rover is a good old fellow, but he has the troublesome trick of giving tongue unnecessarily. He would not have hurt you, but I should be very sorry to think he had frightened you. To heel, sir!" angrily.

"No, he did not frighten me," repeated Leam.

Never loquacious, there was something about this man's face and manner, his masterful spirit underneath his courteous bearing, his look of masculine power and domination, his admiring eyes that fixed themselves on her so unflinchingly—not with insolence, but as if he had the prescriptive right of manhood to look at her, only a woman, as he chose, he commanding and she obeying—that quelled and silenced her even beyond her wont. He was the first gentleman of noteworthy appearance who had ever spoken to her—not counting Alick, nor the masters who had taught her at school, nor Mr. Birkett, nor Mr. Fairbairn, as gentlemen of noteworthy appearance—and the first of all things has a special influence over young minds.

"You are brave to walk so far alone: you ought to have a dog like Rover to protect you," Edgar said, still looking at her with those unflinching eyes, which oppressed her even when she did not see them.

"I am not brave, and I do not care for dogs. Besides, I do not often walk so far as this; but I felt the valley stifling to-day," answered Leam, in her matter-of-fact, categorical way.

"All the same, you ought to have protection," Edgar said authoritatively, and Leam did not reply.

She only looked at him earnestly, wondering against what she should be protected, having abandoned by this time her belief in banditti and wild beasts.

If his eyes oppressed her, hers half embarrassed him. There was such a strange mixture of intensity and innocence in them, he scarcely knew how to meet them.

"It is absurd to pretend that we do not know each other," then said Edgar after a short pause, smiling; and his smile was very sweet and pleasant. "You are Miss Dundas—I am Edgar Harrowby."

"Yes, I know," Leam answered.

"How is that?" he asked. "*I* knew *you* from your photograph—once seen not to be forgotten again," gallantly—"but how should you know me?"

Leam raised her eyes from the ground where she had cast them. Those slow full looks, intense, tragic, fixed, had a startling effect of which she was wholly unconscious. Edgar felt his own grow dark and tender as he met hers. If the soul and mind within only answered to the mask without, what queen or goddess could surpass this half-breed Spanish girl, this country-born, unnoted, but glorious Leam Dundas? he thought.

"And I knew you from yours," she answered.

"An honor beyond my deserts," said Edgar.

Not that he thought the notice of a girl, even with such a face as this, beyond his deserts. Indeed, if a queen or a goddess had condescended to him, it would not have been a grace beyond his merits; but it sounded pretty to say so, and served to make talk as well as anything else. And to make talk was the main business on hand at this present moment.

"Why an honor?" asked Leam, ignorant of the elements of flirting.

Edgar smiled again, and this time his smile without words troubled her. It seemed the assertion of superior intelligence, contemptuous, if half pitiful of her ignorance. Once so serenely convinced of her superiority, Leam was now as suspicious of her shortcomings, and was soon abashed.

Edgar did not see that he had troubled her. Masterful and masculine to an eminent degree, the timid doubts and fears of a young girl were things he could not recognize. He had no point in his own nature with which they came in contact, so that he should sympathize with them. He knew the whole fence and foil of

coquetry, the signs of silent flattery, the sweet language of womanly self-conscious love, whether wooing or being won; but the fluttering misgivings of youth and absolute inexperience were dark to him. All of which he felt conscious was that here was something deliciously fresh and original, and that Leam was more beautiful to look at than Adelaide, and a great deal more interesting to talk to.

"If you will allow me, now that I have had the pleasure of meeting you, I will see you safe for at least part of your way home," he said, passing by her naïve query "Why an honor?" as a thing to be answered only by that smile of superior wisdom.

Flinging himself from his horse, he took the bridle in his hand and turned toward home, looking to the girl to accompany him. Leam felt that she could not refuse his escort offered as so much a matter of course. Why should she? It was very pleasant to have some one to walk with—some one not her father, with whom she still felt shy, if not now absolutely estranged; nor yet Alick, in whose pale face she was always reading the past, and who, though he was so good and kind and tender, was her master and held her in his hand. This handsome, courteous gentleman was different from either, and she liked his society and superior ways. And as he began now to talk to her of things not trenching on nor admitting of flirtation—chiefly of the places he had visited, India, Egypt, Italy, Spain—she was not so much abashed by his unflinching looks and masterful manner.

When he entered on Spain and his recollections of what he had seen there, the girl's heart throbbed, and her pale face grew whiter still with the passionate thrill that stirred her. The old blood was in her veins yet, and, though modified, and in some sense transformed, she was still Pepita's daughter and the child of Andalusia. And here was truth; not like that poor wretched madame's talk, which even she had found out to be false and only making believe to know what she did not know. Spain was the name of power with Leam, as it had been with her mother, and she lifted her face, white with its passionate desires, listening as if entranced to all that Edgar said.

It was a good opening, and the handsome soldier-squire congratulated himself on his lucky hit and serviceable memory. Presently he touched on Andalusia, and Leam, who hitherto had been listening without comment, now broke in eagerly. "That is my own country!" she cried. "Mamma came from Andalusia, beautiful Andalusia! Ah! how I should like to go there!"

"Perhaps you will some day," Edgar answered a little significantly.

Had she been more instructed in the kind of thing he meant, she would have seen that he wished to convey the idea of a love-journey made with him.

She shook her head and her eyes grew moist and dewy. "Not now," she said mournfully. "Poor mamma has gone, and there is no one now to take me."

"I will make up a party some day, and you shall be one of us," said Edgar.

She brightened all over. "Ah! that would be delightful!" she cried, taking him seriously. "When do you think we shall go?"

"I will talk about it," Edgar answered, though smiling again — Leam wished he would not smile so often—a little aghast at her literalness, and saying to himself in warning that he must be careful of what he said to Leam Dundas. It was evident that she did not understand either badinage or a joke. But her very earnestness pleased him for all its oddity. It was so unlike the superficiality and levity of the modern girl—that hateful Girl of the Period, in whose existence he believed, and of whose influence he stood in almost superstitious awe. He liked that grave, intense way of hers, which was neither puritanical nor stolid, but, on the contrary, full of unspoken passion, rich in latent concentrated power.

"They are very beautiful, are they not?" Leam asked suddenly.

"What? who?" was Edgar's answer.

"The Andalusian women, and the men," returned Leam.

"The men are fine-looking fellows

enough," answered Edgar carelessly—"a little too brutal for my taste, but well-grown men for all that. But I have seen prettier women out of Spain than in it."

"Mamma used to say they were so beautiful—the most beautiful of all the women in the world; and the best." Leam said this with a disappointed air and her old injured accent.

Edgar laughed softly. "The prettiest Andalusian woman I have ever seen has an English father," he answered, with a sudden flush on his handsome face as he bent it a little nearer to hers.

"How odd!" said Leam. "An English father? That is like me."

Edgar looked at her, to read how much of this was real ingenuousness, how much affected simplicity. He saw only a candid inquiring face with a faint shade of surprise in its quiet earnestness, unquestionably not affected.

"Just so," he answered. "Exactly like you."

His voice and manner made Leam blush uncomfortably. She was conscious of something disturbing, without knowing what it was. She first looked up into his face with the same expression of inquiry as before, then down to the earth perplexedly, when suddenly the truth came upon her: he meant herself—she was the prettiest Andalusian he had ever seen.

She was intensely humiliated at her discovery. Not one of those girls who study every feature, every gesture, every point, till there is not a square inch of their personality of which they are not painfully conscious, Leam had never taken herself into artistic consideration at all. She had been proud of her Spanish blood, of her mantilla, her high comb and her fan; but of herself as a woman among women she knew nothing, nor whether she was plain or pretty. Indeed, had she had to say offhand which, she would have answered plain. The revelation which comes sooner or later to all women of the charms they possess had not yet come to her; and Edgar's words, making the first puncture in her ignorance, pained her more by the shock which they gave her self-consciousness than they pleased her by their flattery.

She said no more, but walked by his side with her head held very high and slightly turned away. She was sorry that he had offended her. They had been getting on together so well until he had said this foolish thing, and now they were like friends who had quarreled. She was quite sorry that he had been so foolish as to offend her, but she must not forgive him—at least not just yet. It was very wrong of him to tell her that she was prettier than the true children of the soil; and she resented the slight to Spain and to her mother, as well as the wrong done to herself, by his saying that which was not true. So she walked with her little head held high, and Edgar could get nothing more out of her. When Leam was offended coaxings to make her forget were of no avail. She had to wear through an impression by herself, and it was useless to try for a premature pardon.

Edgar saw that he had overshot the mark, and that his best policy now was absence; wherefore, after a few moments' silence, he remounted his horse, looking penitent, handsome, full of admiration and downcast.

"I hope we shall soon see you at the Hill, Miss Dundas," he said, holding her hand in his for his farewell a little longer than was quite necessary for good breeding or even cordiality.

"I very seldom go to the Hill," answered Leam, looking past his head.

"But you will come, and soon?" fervently.

"Perhaps: I do not know," answered Leam, still looking past his head, and embarrassed to a most uncomfortable extent.

"Thank you," he said, as if he had been thanking her for the grace of his life; and with a long look, lifting his hat again, he rode off, just escaping by a few hundred yards the danger of being met walking with Leam by his sisters and Adelaide Birkett. They were all driving together in the phaeton, and the sisters were making much of their young friend.

At that moment Edgar preferred to be met alone and not walking with Leam. He did not stop the carriage—simply

nodded to them all with familiar kindness, as a group of relatives not demanding extra courtesy, flinging a few words behind him as he rode on smiling. Nor did the ladies in their turn stop for Leam, whom they met soon after walking slowly along the road; but Josephine said, as they passed, how pretty Leam looked to-day, and how much softer her face was than it used to be; and Maria, even Maria, agreed with kindly Joseph, and was quite eulogistic on the object of her old disdain. Adelaide sat silent, and did not join in their encomiums.

It would have been a nice point to ascertain if the Misses Harrowby would have praised the girl's beauty as they did had they known that she had grown soft and dewy-eyed by talking of Spain with their brother Edgar, though she had hardened a little afterward when he told her that she was the prettiest Andalusian he had ever seen.

During the dinner at the Hill, where Adelaide was one of the family party, Edgar mentioned casually how that he had met Miss Dundas on the moor, and had had to speak to her because of Rover's misbehavior.

"Yes? and what do you think of her?" asked Mrs. Harrowby with a sharp glance.

"I scarcely know: I have hardly seen her as yet," he answered.

"Did she say or do anything very extraordinary to-day?" asked Adelaide with such an air of contemptuous curiosity as seemed to him insufferably insolent.

"No, nothing. Is she in the habit of saying or doing extraordinary things?" he answered back, arching his eyebrows and speaking in a well-affected tone of sincere inquiry.

"At times she is more like a maniac than a sane person," said Adelaide, breaking her bread with deliberation. "What can you expect from such a parentage and education as hers?"

Edgar looked down and smiled satirically. "Poor Pepita's sins lie heavy on your mind," he answered.

"Yes, I believe in race," was her reply.

"Mother," then said Edgar after a short silence, "why do you not have Miss Dundas to dine here with Adelaide? It would be more amusing to her, for it must be dull"—turning to their guest and speaking amiably, considerately—"I am afraid very dull—to be so often quite alone with us."

He did not add what he thought, that it was almost indelicate in her to be here so often. He was out of humor with her to-day.

"She is such an uncertain girl we never know how she may be. I had her to stay here once, and I do not want to repeat the experiment," was Mrs. Harrowby's answer.

"But, mamma, that was before she went to school, when she was quite a child. She is so much improved now," pleaded Josephine.

"Good little soul!" said Edgar under his breath.—"Wine, Joseph?" aloud, as his recognition of her good offices.

"And I like coming alone best, thanks," said Adelaide with unruffled calmness. "Leam has never been my friend; indeed, I do not like her, and you all," to the sisters, with a gracious smile and prettily, "have always been my favorite companions."

"Still, she is very lonely, and it would be kind. Besides, she is good to look at," said Edgar.

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Harrowby with crisp lips and ill-concealed displeasure.

"Do I think so, mother? I should have no eyes else. She is superb. I have never seen such a face. She is the most beautiful creature I have ever known of any nation."

Adelaide's delicate pink cheeks turned pale, and then they flushed a brilliant rose as she laid down her spoon and left her jelly untasted.

There were no trials of skill at chess, no duets, no solos, this evening. After dinner Edgar went to his own room and sat there smoking. He felt revolted at the idea of spending two or three hours with what he irreverently called "a lot of dull women," and preferred his own thoughts to their talk. He sauntered into the drawing-room about ten minutes before Adelaide had to leave, apologizing for his absence on the man's easy plea

of "business," saying he was sorry to have missed her charming society, and he hoped they should see her there soon again, and so on—all in the proper voice and manner, but with a certain ring of insincerity in the tones which Adelaide detected, if the others did not. But she accepted his excuses with the most admirable tact, smiling to the sisters as she said, "Oh, we have been very happy, Josephine, have we not? though," with a nice admission of Edgar's claims, not too broadly stated nor too warmly allowed, "of course it would have been very pleasant if you could have come in too."

"It has been my loss," said Edgar.

She smiled "Yes" by eyes, lips and turn of her graceful head. In speech she answered, "Of that, of course, you are the best judge for yourself; but none of us here feel as some girls do, lost without gentlemen to amuse them. We can get on very well by ourselves. Cannot we, Joseph?"

And Josephine said gallantly, "Yes," but her heart was more rueful than her voice, and she thought that some gentlemen were very nice, and that Sebastian Dundas especially made the dull time pass pleasantly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CHILD FINA.

NOTHING surprised the North Astonians more than what it was the fashion to call "the admirable manner in which Leam behaved to the child Fina." If the world which praised her had known all the compelling circumstances, would it have called her admirable then? Yet beyond those natural promptings of remorse which forced her to do the best she could for the child whom her fatal crime had rendered motherless, Leam did honestly behave well, if this means doing irksome things without complaint and sacrificing self to a sense of right. And this was all the more praiseworthy in that sympathy of nature between these two young creatures there was none, and the girl's maternal instinct was not of that universal kind which makes all children pleasant, whatever they may be. Hence, she did nobly when she did her duty with the uncompromising exactness characteristic of her; but then it was only duty; it was not love.

How should it be love? Her tenacity and reserve were ill matched with Fina's native inconstancy of purpose and childish incontinence of speech; her pride of race resented her father's adoption of a stranger into the penetralia of the family; and to share the name she had inherited from her mother with the daughter of that mother's rival seemed to her a wrong done to both the living and the dead. Naturally taciturn, unjoyful, and ever oppressed by that brooding consciousness of guilt hanging like a cloud over her memory, formless, vague, but never lifting, Fina's changeful temper and tumultuous vivacity were intensely wearisome to her. Nevertheless, she was forbearing if not loving, and the people said rightly when they said she was admirable.

Her grave patience with the little one did more to open her father's heart to her than did even her own wonderful beauty, which gratified his paternal pride of authorship, or than her efforts after docility to himself—efforts that would have been creditable to any one, and that with her were heroic. For Mr. Dundas, being of those clinging, clasping natures which must love some one, had taken poor madame's child into his affections in the wholesale manner so emphatically his own, now in these first days of his new paternity seeming to live only for the little Fina, and never happy but when he had her with him. It was the first time that he felt he had had a child of his own; and he gave her the love which would have been Leam's had Pepita been less of a savage than she was, and more discreet in the matter of doll-dressing.

The little round, fair-haired creature, with her picturesque Gainsborough head and rose-red lips, pretty, pleasant, facile, easily amused if easily made cross, divertible from her purpose if she was but coaxed and caressed, and if the substitute offered was to her liking—without

tenacity, fluid, floating on the surface of things and born of their froth; loving only those who ministered to her pleasure and were in sight; forgetting yesterday's joys as though they had never been, and her dearest the moment they were absent — a child deliciously caressing because sensual by temperament and instinctively diplomatic, with no latent greatness to be developed as time went on and the flower set into the fruit. Epitomizing the characteristics of the class of which her mother had been a typical example, she was the pleasantest thing of his life to a man who cared mainly to be amused, and who liked with a woman's liking to be loved.

The strong love of children inherent in him, which had never been satisfied till now, seemed now to have gathered tenfold strength, and the love of the man, who had never cared for his own, for this his little daughter by adoption was almost a passion. If Leam could have been jealous where she did not love, she would have been jealous of her father and Fina. But she was not. On the contrary, it seemed to soften some of the bitterness of her self-reproach, and she was glad that madame's motherless child was not deserted, but had found a substitute for the protection which she had taken from her; for Leam, criminal, was not ignoble.

A few days after the meeting on the moor between Leam and Edgar, Mr. Dundas drove to the Hill, carrying Fina with him. Leam had a fit of shyness and refused to go: thus Sebastian had the child to himself, and was not sorry to be without his elder and less congenial daughter. He owned to himself that she was good, very good indeed, and a great deal better than he ever expected she would be; yet for all that, with her more than Oriental gravity and reserve, and that look of tragedy haunting her face, she was not an amusing companion, and the little one was.

Mr. Dundas had begun to take up his old habits again with the Harrowbys. He found the patient constancy of his friend Josephine not a disagreeable salve for a wounded heart and broken life; albeit poor dear Joseph was getting stout and matronly, and took off the keen edge of courtship by a willingness too manifest for wisdom. Sebastian liked to be loved, but he did not like to be bored by being made overmuch love to. The things are different, and most men resent the latter, how much soever they desire the former.

Edgar was in the drawing-room when Mr. Dundas was announced. He was booted and spurred, waiting his horse to be brought round. "What a pretty little girl!" he said after a time. True to his type, he was fond of children and animals, and children and animals liked him. "Come and speak to me," he continued, holding out his hand to Fina.— "Whose child is she?" vaguely to the company in general.

"Mine," said Mr. Dundas emphatically— "my youngest daughter, Fina Dundas."

Edgar knew what he meant. He had often heard the story from his sisters, and since his return home he had had Adelaide Birkett's comments thereon. He looked then with even more interest on the pretty little creature in dark-blue velvet and swansdown, careless, unconscious, happy, as the child of a mystery and a tragedy in one.

"Ah!" he said sympathetically. "Come to me, little one," again, coaxingly.

Fina, with her finger in her mouth, went up to him half shyly, half boldly, and wholly prettily. She let him take her on his knee and kiss her without remonstrance. She was of the kind to like being taken on knees and kissed— especially by gentlemen who were strong and matronly women who were soft— and she soon made friends. Not many minutes elapsed before, kneeling upon his knees, she was stroking his tawny beard and plaiting it in threes, pulling his long moustache, playing with his watch-guard, and laughing in his face with the pretty audacity of six.

"What a dear little puss!" cried Edgar, caressing her. "Very like you, Joseph, I should think, when you were her age, judging by your picture. Is she not, mother?"

"They say so, but I do not see it," answered Mrs. Harrowby primly.

She did not like to hear about this resemblance. There was something in it that annoyed her intensely, she scarcely knew why, and the more so because it was true.

"Poor madame used to say so: she saw it from the first, when Fina was quite a little baby," said Josephine in a low voice.

She was kneeling by her brother's side caressing Fina. She always made love to the little girl: it was one of her methods of making love to the father.

"Is she like her mother?" asked Edgar in the same low tones, looking at the child critically.

"A little," answered Josephine—"not much. It is odd, is it not, that she should be more like me?"

Just then Fina laid her fresh sweet lips against Edgar's, and he kissed her with a strange thrill of tenderness.

"Why, Edgar, I never saw you take so to a child before," cried Mrs. Harrowby, not quite pleasantly; and on Sebastian adding with his nervous little laugh, which meant the thing it assumed only to play at, "I declare I shall be quite jealous, Edgar, if you make love to my little girl like this," Edgar, who had the Englishman's dislike to observation, save when he offered himself for personal admiration, laughed too and put Fina away.

But the child had taken a fancy to him, and could scarcely be induced to leave him. She clung to his hand still, and went reluctantly when her stepfather called her. It was a very little matter, but men being weak in certain directions, it delighted Edgar and annoyed Sebastian beyond measure.

"I hope your elder daughter is well," then said Edgar, emphasizing the adjective, the vision of Leam as he first saw her, breasting the wind, filling his eyes with a strange light.

"Leam? Quite well, thanks. But how do you know anything about her?" was Sebastian's reply.

"I met her yesterday on the moor, and Rover introduced us," answered Edgar laughing.

"How close she is!" said her father fretfully. "She never told me a word about it."

"Perhaps she thought the incident too trifling," suggested Edgar, a little chagrined.

"Oh no, not at all! In a place like North Aston the least thing counts as an adventure; and meeting for the first time one of the neighbors is not an incident to be forgotten as if it were of no more value than meeting a flock of sheep."

Mr. Dundas spoke peevishly. To a man who liked to be amused and who lived on crumbs this reserved companionship was disappointing and tiresome.

"Leam is at home making music," said Fina disdainfully. She had caught the displeased accent of her adopted father, and echoed it.

"Does she make much music?" asked Edgar with his hand under her chin, turning up her face.

The child shrugged her little shoulders. "She makes a noise," she said; and those who heard her laughed.

"That is not a very polite way of putting it," said Edgar a little gravely.

"No," said Josephine.

"You should speak nicely of your sister, my little one," put in Sebastian.

Fina looked up into his face reproachfully. "You called it a noise yourself, papa," she said, pouting. "You made her leave off yesterday as soon as you came in, because you said she made your head ache with her noise, and set your teeth — something, I don't know what."

"Did I, dear?" he repeated carelessly. "Well, we need not discuss the subject. I dare say it amuses her to make music, as you call it, and so we need say no more about it."

"But you did say it was a noise," persisted Fina, climbing on to his knees and putting her arms round his neck. "And I think it a noise too."

"Poor Leam's music cannot be very first-rate," remarked Maria, who was a proficient and played almost as well as a "professional." "Four years ago she did not know her notes, and four years'

practice cannot be expected to make a perfect pianiste."

"But a person may play very sweetly and yet not be what you call perfect," said Edgar.

"Do you think so?" Maria answered with a frosty smile. "I do not." Of what use to have toiled for thirty years early and late at scales and thorough-bass if a stupid girl like Leam could be allowed to play sweetly after four years' desultory practice? "Adelaide Birkett, if you will, plays well," she added; "but Leam, poor child! how should she?"

"I hope I shall have an opportunity of judging for myself," said Edgar with his company manner.—"When will you come and dine here, Dundas?—to-morrow? You and your elder daughter: we shall be very glad to see you."

He looked to his mother. Mrs. Harrowby had drawn her lips tight, and wore an injured air doing its best to be resigned. This was Edgar's first essay in domestic mastership, and it pained her, not unnaturally,

"Thanks," said Sebastian. "Willingly, if—" looking to Mrs. Harrowby.

"I have no engagement, and Edgar is master now," said that lady.

"And mind that Leam comes too," said Josephine, sharing her favorite brother's action by design.

"And me," cried Fina.

Whereat they all laughed, which made Fina cry, to be consoled only by some sweetmeats which Josephine found in her work-basket.

It was agreed, then, that the next day Leam and her father should dine at the Hill.

"Only ourselves," Edgar said, wanting the excuse of her "being the only lady" to devote himself to Leam. It was strange that he should be so anxious to see her nearer, and in company with his sisters and mother; for after all, why should he? What was she to him, either near or afar off, alone or in the inner circle of his family?

But when the next day came Mr. Dundas appeared alone. Leam had been taken with a fit of shyness, pride—who shall say?—and refused to accept her share of the invitation. Her father made the stereotyped excuse of "headache;" but headaches occur too opportunely to be always real, and Leam's to-night was set down to the fancy side of the account, and not believed in by the hearers any more than by the bearer.

Edgar raged against her in his heart, and decided that she was not worth a second thought, while the ladies said in an undertone from each to each, "How rude!" Maria adding, "How like Leam!" the chain of condemnation receiving no break till it came to Josephine, whose patient soul refrained from wrath, and gave as her link, "Poor Leam! perhaps she is shy or has really a headache."

In spite of his decision that she was not worth a second thought, the impression which Leam had made on Edgar deepened with his disappointment, and he became restless and unpleasant in his temper, casting about for means whereby he might see her again. He cast about in vain. This fit of shyness, pride, reluctance—who knows what?—continued with Leam for many days after this. If she went out at all, she went where she knew she should not be met; and if Edgar called at Ford House, she was not to be found. She mainly devoted herself to Fina and some books lent her by Alick, and kept the house with strange persistency. Perhaps this was because the weather was bad, for Leam, who could bear wind and frost and noonday sun, could not bear wet. When it rained she shut herself up in her own room, and pitied herself for the ungenial skies as she had pitied herself for some other things before now.

Sitting thus reading one miserably dark, cold, misty day, the child Fina came in to her with her lessons, which she repeated well. They were very small and insignificant little lessons, for Leam had a fellow-feeling for the troubles of ignorance, and laid but a light hand on the frothy mind inside that curly head. When they were finished the little one said coaxingly, "Now play with me, Leam! You never play with me."

"What can I do, Fina?" poor Leam replied.

She had never learnt to play when she was a child: she had never built towers and towns, made railway trains and coaches with the sofa and chairs, played at giants through the dark passages and screamed when she was caught. She had only sat still when mamma was asleep, or when she was awake played on the zambomba, or listened to her when she told her of the things of Spain, and made up stories with her dolls that were less edifying than those of Mother Bunch. She could scarcely, however, unpack that old box full of waxen puppets, with the one dressed in scarlet and black, with fishbone horns and a worsted tail, and a queer clumped kind of foot made of folds of leather, cleft in the middle, that used to go by the name of "El señor papa." What could she do?

"Shall I tell you a story?" she then said in a mild fit of desperation, for story-telling was as little in her way as anything else.

"Yes, yes, tell me a story!" Fina clapped her chubby hands together and climbed up into Leam's lap.

"What shall it be about — bears or tigers, or what?" asked Leam dutifully.

"Tell me about mamma, my own mamma, not Aunty Birkett," said Fina.

Leam shuddered from head to foot. This was the first time the little girl had mentioned her mother's name to her. Indeed, she did not know that she had ever heard of her at all—ever known that she had had a mother; but the servants had talked, and the child's curiosity was aroused. The dead mother is as much a matter of wondering inquiry as the angels and the stars; and Fina's imagination was beginning to bestir itself on the mysteries of childish life.

"I have nothing to tell you about her," said Leam, controlling herself, though she still shivered.

"Yes, you have—everything," insisted Fina. "Was mamma pretty?" playing with a corner of her sister's ribbon.

"People said so," answered Leam.

"As pretty as Cousin Addy?" she asked.

"About," said Leam, who thought neither supreme.

"Prettier than you?"

"I don't know: how can I tell?" she answered a little impatiently.

The mother's blood that ran in her, the mother's mould in which she had been formed, forbade her to put herself below madame in anything; but, as she was neither vain nor conscious, she found Fina's question difficult to answer.

"Oh," cried Fina, in a tone of disappointment, "then she could not have been very pretty."

"I dare say she was, but I do not know," returned Leam.

"And she died?" continued Fina, yawning in a childishly indifferent manner.

"Yes, she died."

"Why? Who killed her? Did papa?" asked Fina.

Leam's face was very white: "No, not papa."

"Did God?"

"I cannot tell you, Fina," said Leam, to whom falsehoods were abhorrent and the truth impossible.

"Did you?" persisted Fina with childish obstinacy.

"Now go," said Leam, putting her off her lap and rising from her chair in strange disorder. "You are troublesome and ask too many questions."

Fina began to cry loudly, and Mr. Dundas, from his library below, heard her. He came up stairs with his fussy, restless kindness, and opened the door of the room where his two daughters, of nature and by adoption, were.

"Heyday! what's all this about?" he cried. "What's the matter, my little Fina? what are you crying for? Tut, tut! you should not cry like this, darling; and, Leam," severely, "you should really keep the child better amused and happy. She is as good as gold with me: with you there is always something wrong."

Fina ran into his arms sobbing. "Leam is cross," she said. "She will not tell me who killed mamma."

The man's ruddy face, reddened and roughened with travel, grew white and pitiful. "God took her away, my darling," he said with a sob. "She was too

good for me, and He took her to live with the angels in heaven."

"And Leam's mamma? Is she in heaven too with the angels?" asked Fina, opening her eyes wide through their tears.

"I hope so," Sebastian answered in an altered voice.

Leam covered her face in her hands; then lifting it up, she said imploringly, "Papa, do not talk to her of mamma. It is sacrilege."

"I agree with you, Leam," said Mr. Dundas in a steady voice. "We meet at the same point, but perhaps by different methods.'

PART VII.

CHAPTER XXV.

SMALL CAUSES.

THE frost came early this year; and by the second week in December the ponds and shallows in the neighborhood of North Aston were covered with ice that made good sliding-grounds for the children. Presently it grew and spread till the deeper waters were frozen over, and a skating-rink was formed of the Broad that bore the heavier weights without danger. It was a merry time for the North Astonians; and even the elder men strapped on their skates and took colds and contusions in their endeavors to double back on their supple youth and to forget the stiffer facts of time. As for the young people, they were in the full swing of innocent enjoyment; and the girls wished that the frost would last through the whole of the winter, so that they might make up skating-parties with the boys every day, and avoid the unmeaning deadness of "tender" weather.

This ice had been in perfect condition for three days and the Broad had been thronged, but Leam had not appeared. All the other young ladies of the country had come, Adelaide Birkett one of the most diligent in her attendance, for was not Edgar Harrowby one of the most constant in his? But though more than one pair of eyes had looked anxiously along the road that led to Ford House, which some people still continued to call Andalusia Cottage, no lithe, graceful figure had been seen gliding between the frosted hedgerows, and Edgar, like Alick, had skated in disappointment, the former with the feeling of an actor playing to an empty house when he made his finest turns and she was not there to see them; the latter with the self-reproach of one taking enjoyment abroad while the beloved is sitting in solitude and dreariness at home.

At last, on the fourth day, she came down with her father; and to at least two on the ground the advent of a slender-waisted girl with dark eyes and small feet changed the whole aspect of things, and made life for the moment infinitely more beautiful and desirable than it had been. It was a brilliant day, with as fine a sun as England can show in winter—no wind, but a clear air, crisp, dry and exhilarating. Every one was there—Edgar, the most graceful of the skaters; Alick, the most awkward; Dr. Corfield, essaying careful little spurts, schoolboy fashion, along the edges; and the portly rector, proud to show his past superiority in sharp criticism on the style of the present day as a voucher for his own greater grace and skill in the days when he too was an Adonis for the one part and an Admirable Crichton for the other, and carried no superfluous flesh about his ribs. Among them, too, looking on the scene as if it was something in which he had no inherited share, as if these were not men and women to whom he was sib on Adam's side, but cunningly contrived machines whose movements he contemplated with benign indifference, was to be seen the mild philosophic occupant of Lionnet—that Mr. Gryce of whom no one knew more than that he studied dead languages through the day and caught moths and beetles in the twilight, had come without letters of introduction and was never seen at church; hence that he was a man of whom to beware, and a dangerous element among them. The pendulum of acceptance, which had swung so far on one side in the unguaranteed reception of Madame de Montfort, had now gone back to the corresponding extent on the other; and no one, not even Mr. Birkett as the clergyman, nor Mr. Dundas as the landlord, had held out a finger to the new-comer, not to speak of a hand; while all regarded his presence at North Aston as rather a liberty than otherwise. Nevertheless,

as time would show, though he had come there without purpose and lived among the people without interest, he would not be found without his uses, and one at least of the threads making up the skein of life at North Aston would be placed in his hands.

As Leam came to the side both Edgar Harrowby and Alick Corfield turned to greet her, the usually sad face of the curate, already brightened by fresh air and exercise, brighter still at seeing her, the handsome head of the squire held a little higher as his figure involuntarily straightened and he put out his best powers in her honor. But Alick's shambling legs carried him fastest, and he was first at the edge, the neighborhood looking on, prepared to build a Tower of Babel heaven high on the foundation of a single brick. Leam Dundas had not yet been fitted with her hypothetical mate, and people wanted to see to whom they were to give her.

"Oh, come on with me!" cried Alick as soon as he came up, speaking with the unconscious familiarity of gladness at the advent for which he had watched so long. He held out his arm to Leam crooked awkwardly at the elbow.

"No," said Leam a little shortly.

She always stiffened when Alick spoke to her before folk with anything like intimacy in his manner. He was her good friend, granted, and she liked him in a way and respected him in a way, though he was still too much after the pattern of her former slave and dog to gain her best esteem. She was one of those women who are arbitrary and disdainful to masculine weakness, and require to be absolutely dominated by men if they are to respect them as men like to be respected by women, and as—*pace* the Shriekers—the true woman likes to respect men. And Alick, though he had her in his hands and might destroy her at a word—clergyman, too, as he was, and thus possessing the key to higher things than she knew—was always so humble, so subservient, he made her feel as if she was his superior—not, as it should have been, that he was hers. In consequence, girl-like, proud and shy, she treated him with more disdain than she ought to have done, and used the power which he himself gave her without much consideration as to its effect. Besides, she did not wish to let people think he knew too much of her. With the nervous fancy of youth, ever believing itself to be transparent and understood all through, she imagined it would be seen that he had the right to speak to her familiarly—that he had her in his hand to destroy her at a word if so minded. Wherefore she said "No" shortly, and turned away her eyes as her protest against his glad face, crooked elbow and eager offer.

"I will not let you fall, and it is very jolly," cried Alick cheerily, more like the boyish Alick of former days than the ascetic young curate of modern times.

"I do not like it," said Leam.

Alick's countenance fell; and when his face, always long, became longer still, with a congealed-looking skin, sad, red-lidded eyes and a hanging under lip, it was not lovely. Indeed, according to the miserable fatality which so often makes the spiritually best the physically worst—like the gods whom the Athenians enclosed in outer cases of satyrs and hideous masks of misshapen men—Alick's face was never lovely. But his soul? If that could have been seen, the old carved parable of the Greeks would have been justified.

"Nonsense, Leam! Why cannot you do as others do?" cried Mr. Dundas.

He wanted to get rid of her for a while, and he was not unwilling that Alick, whose affection he suspected, should rid him of her for ever if he cared to saddle himself for life with such an uncomfortable companion.

"I do not like it," repeated Leam.

"Nonsense!" said her father again. "Other girls are on. Why should you not join them? I see Adelaide Birkett and the Fairbairns. Why not go to them with Alick?"

"It looks silly balancing one's self on the edge of a knife. And I should fall," said Leam.

"No, you shall not fall," Alick pleaded. "I will undertake that you shall not."

His arm was still held out, always awkwardly crooked.

Leam lifted her eyes. "No," she said with her old calm decision, and moved away. Four years ago she would have supplemented her refusal by the words, "You are stupid. You tease me." Now she contented herself with action and accent.

Alick, very sorry, moist-eyed from disappointment, but not caring to stand there and get chilled—for our good Alick was a little afraid of cold, after the manner of mothers' sons in general—skated off again to keep up his circulation, his knees bent, his chin forward, his arms swinging as balance-weights to his long body, the ends of his white woolen comforter flying behind him, and his legs running anywhere, the clumsiest and most ungraceful skater on the Broad. All the same, he never fell, and he went faster than even Edgar in his perfection of manly elegance.

Edgar had watched the whole of this little scene between Leam and Alick while seeming to be occupied only in executing his spread eagles and outside curves to perfection, and it was no secret to him what it meant. The demon of masculine vanity, never far off where a pretty woman was concerned, entered and took possession of him. He would succeed where Alick Corfield had failed, and Leam, who refused her old friend, should gratify her new. He had been guiding Adelaide over the ice, but she was rather too stiff in her movements, not sufficiently pliant nor yielding to be a very pleasant skating companion. And he had been pushing Josephine along the slide, but Joseph was too stout and short-breathed to be an ideal convoy; also he had been racing and half romping with the Fairbairn girls, who slipped and tumbled and laughed and screamed—more hoydenish than he thought pleasing; but now he intended to reward himself with Leam, whose action he was sure would be all that was delightful, even though unaccustomed, and who would look so well on his arm. Her slight and supple figure against his breadth and height and sense of solidity and strength, her dark hair and his beard of tawny brown, her large dark eyes and his of true Saxon blue, her southern face, oval in shape, cream-colored in tint, and his, square, open, ruddy, Scandinavian,—yes, they would make a splendid pair by their very contrast; and Edgar, narrowing his ambition to his circumstances, was quietly resolved to win the day over Alick Corfield by inducing Leam to cross the Broad with him after she had so manifestly refused her old friend. It was but a small object of ambition, but we must do what we can, thought Edgar; and it is the best wisdom to content ourselves with mice when we have no lions to destroy. He did not, however, rush up to her with Alick's tactless precipitancy. He waited just long enough for her to desire, and not so long as to disappoint; then, speaking to Adelaide by the way, and giving her and Josephine each a helping hand, he came in a series of clean, showy curves to where Leam and her father were standing.

Leam was glad to meet again this handsome man who had seen so much and who talked so well. He was something different from the rest, and so far superior to them all. But, not being one of those instinctive girls who yield without pressure and fall in love at first sight, there were no flushings nor palpitations as Edgar came up; only a grave little smile stole half timidly over her face, and she forgot that he had insulted her mother's country by calling her the prettiest Andalusian he had ever seen.

"Do you skate, Miss Dundas?" asked Edgar after a while, during which he had been talking of different matters, beginning with the weather, that camel of English conversation, and ending with the state of the ice and the chances of a thaw. His five minutes of commonplaces seemed an eternity to Adelaide, watching them jealously from a distance.

"No," said Leam.

"I want her to learn; and this is a good opportunity," put in her father.

"You are right. It is a capital exercise and a graceful accomplishment," said Edgar. "I think a woman never

looks better than when she is skating," he added carelessly.

"I think she looks silly," said Leam.

He laughed. "That is because you are not English *pur sang*," he cried gayly. "If you had only the brave old Norse blood in you, you would take to the frost and ice like second nature."

"No, I am not English *pur sang*," answered Leam gravely. "I am more than half Spanish," a little proudly.

"Hang it all, you can't make it more than half!" said her father testily.

"And that makes such a splendid combination," said Edgar, slightly lowering his voice as, ignoring his remark, he turned away from Mr. Dundas and gave himself wholly to Leam. "Spanish for art and poetry and all the fervid beauty of the South—English for the courage, the hardihood, the energy of the North. You ought to cultivate the characteristics of both nationalities, Miss Dundas," in a louder tone; "and to do justice to one of them you ought to learn to skate."

"That's right, Edgar; so I say," cried Mr. Dundas, who had heard only the last part.

"I cannot learn," said Leam; but her face became strangely flushed, and she felt her resolution growing limp as her cheeks grew red.

"Yes, you can. I could teach you in half an hour," cried Edgar, pulling down his coat-cuffs with an air.

"Go, Leam: let Major Harrowby give you a lesson," said her father. "Perhaps he is a better teacher than that shambling-looking Alick. Go, child."

"Shall I?" asked Edgar. "At least let me assist you to cross the ice, if without skates at first."

He held out his hand.

"I shall fall," objected reluctant Leam.

"No, you shall not. I will answer for that. Come. Will you not trust me?" This last phrase was said half tenderly, half with an offended kind of remonstrance, and he was still holding out his hand.

"Go, Leam," urged her father.

"It is silly, and I shall fall," repeated Leam.

Nevertheless, she put her hand in Edgar's, and he took her on his arm in triumph.

At first her steps were slow and timid; but as her feet grew more accustomed to the unusual ground, as she gained more confidence in the strong arm that held her like a bar of iron, as her youth began to assert itself in the physical pleasure of the fresh air and the gliding movement, she lost her shyness and timidity, and she found herself almost laughing—she, who never laughed and only so rarely smiled.

"You like it?" he asked, looking down on her with a man's admiration for a pretty woman marked in every line and feature.

"Yes, so much!" she answered, her usual reserved, self-centred manner for the moment lost.

"Now you will know how to trust me in future," he said not very loudly.

She looked up to him, carrying her eyes right into his. "Yes, I will," she answered simply.

At this moment Alick joined them, and Leam suddenly lost her new-found joy.

"I am glad you have come on at last," said her faithful dog, effacing himself and his disappointment with an effort.

"They made me," Leam replied.

"I hope not against your will and not to your displeasure," said Edgar, still looking down into her face with the man's admiration of a woman's beauty so strongly marked in his own.

"No," she answered: "I have liked it."

"Let us take her between us, major, and give her a good spin," said Alick, grasping the upper part of her arm uncomfortably.

Edgar slightly pressed the hand he held crosswise. "Would you like to double your protectors?" he asked. "Shall I share my office?"

"No," said Leam. "I like best to be with one person only."

"And possession being the nine points, let us go on," laughed Edgar, whirling her away. "By the by, would you have preferred my giving you to Mr. Corfield

as 'the one person only'?" he asked with affected doubt, making pretence of wishing to know her mind. He was skating rapidly now. It was as good as flying to Leam, and she was happy and very grateful.

"I would rather be with you," she answered.

"Thanks!" said Edgar, and smiled.

"He is awkward, and you are not," continued Leam, anxious to explain. "But I like him very much. He is good and kind; and he cannot help being awkward, can he?"

"No," said Edgar coldly. "So you like him very much, do you?"

"Very much," repeated Leam with loyal emphasis. "He has always been my friend here."

"I hope for the future that I may be included in that sacred place," said Edgar after a pause.

Leam looked at him slowly, fixedly. "You will never be so good to me as he is," she answered.

It was the man's heart that beat now, the man's cheek that flushed. Who could keep his pulses still when those eyes were turned to his with, as it seemed, such maddening meaning? "I will try," he said; and from that moment the die was cast. Edgar put himself in competition with Alick: he lowered his pride to such a rivalry as this, and threw his whole energies into the determination to surpass and supplant a man for whom even the least personable of his own sex need have had no fear.

He kept Leam for a long time after this, laying ground-lines for the future; forgetting Adelaide and the suitability which had hitherto been such an important factor in his calculations; forgetting his horror of Pepita, whose daughter Leam was, and his contempt for weak, fusionless Mr. Dundas, who was her father; forgetting the conventional demands of his class, intolerant of foreign blood; forgetting all but the words which said that Alick was her best friend here, and doubted his (Edgar's) ever being so good to her as that other had been. It was on his heart now to convince her that he could be as good to her as Alick, and, if she would allow him, a great deal better. At last he slackened, and pulled up at the group of which the Fairbairn girls and Adelaide Birkett were the most conspicuous members.

"What a long skate you have had!" said Susy Fairbairn ruefully, for all that she was a good-tempered girl and not disposed to measure her neighbor's wheat by her own bushel. But this was a special matter; for Edgar Harrowby was the pride of the place, and they took count of his doings as of their local prince, and envied the lucky queen of the hour bitterly or sadly according to the mood and the person.

"It was the first time I had tried," said Leam, all aglow with the unwonted exercise and unusual excitement.

"I suppose you began by saying you could not and would not, and then did more than any one else?" said Adelaide in an acrid voice, veiling a very displeased face with a very unpleasant smile; but the veil was too transparent and showed the displeasure with palpable plainness.

Leam looked at her in a half-surprised way. Jealousy was a passion of which she was wholly ignorant, and she did not understand the key-note. She knew nothing of the unspoken affair between Edgar and the rector's daughter, and could not read between the lines. Why was Adelaide cross because she had been a long time upon the ice? Did it hurt her? They had not been near her—not interfered with her in any way: why should she be vexed that they, Major Harrowby and herself, had been enjoying themselves? So she thought, gazing at Adelaide with the serious, searching look which always irritated that young lady, and at this moment almost unbearably.

"I wonder they did not teach you at school that it was rude to stare as you do, Leam," she cried with impolitic haste and bitterness. "What are you looking at? Am I changing into a monster, or what?"

"I am looking at you because you are so cross about nothing," answered Leam gravely. "What does it matter to any one if I have been on the ice long or no? Why should you be angry?"

"Angry!" said Adelaide with supreme disdain. "I am not sufficiently interested in what you do, Leam, to be angry or cross, as you call it. I confess I do not like affectation: that is all."

"Neither do I like affectation," returned Leam. "People should say what they feel."

"Indeed! That might not always be agreeable," said Adelaide with her most sarcastic air. "Perhaps it is as well that the laws of politeness keep one's mouth shut at times, and that we do not say what we feel."

"It would be better," insisted Leam.

"I wonder if you would say so were I to tell you what I thought of you now?" Adelaide replied, measuring her scornfully with her eyes.

"Why should you not? What have I done to be ashamed of?" Leam asked.

"And you call yourself natural and not affected!" Adelaide cried, turning away abruptly.—"How wrong," she said in a low voice to Edgar, "turning the head of such a silly child as this!"

Edgar laughed. The vein of cruelty traversing his nature made him find more amusement than chagrin in Adelaide's patent jealousy: he thought she was silly, and he was rather amazed at her want of dignity; still, it was amusing, and he enjoyed it as so much fun.

But when he laughed Leam's discomfiture was complete. "I am sorry I came on the ice at all," she said with a mixture of her old pride and new softness that made her infinitely lovely, the proud little head held high, but the beautiful eyes dewy. "I have offended every one, and I do not know why." Just then Alick came rambling by. She held out her hand to him. Here at least was her friend and faithful follower. He would not jeer at her nor laugh, nor yet look cross and angry, as if she had done wrong. "Take me to papa," she said superbly, making as if to withdraw her other hand from Edgar.

Alick's homely face brightened like the morning. "Certainly," he said.

"Certainly not," flashed Edgar proudly, taking both her hands in his crosswise and grasping them even more firmly than before. "You are in my charge, Miss Dundas, and I can give you up to no one else—not even by your own desire."

Adelaide's slight cast became an unmistakable squint; the Fairbairn girls fluttered, half frightened at the chance of a fracas; Alick looked irresolute; Edgar looked haughty and displeased; Leam tragic and proud, partly bewildered, partly distressed.

Then Edgar cut the whole thing short by taking her away in silence, but like a whirlwind, saying, when half over the ground and well out of hearing, "What have I done to you, Miss Dundas, that you should try to throw me over like that?"

"You laughed at me," said Leam.

"Laughed at you? You are dreaming."

"You did," she persisted.

"Pardon me: I laughed because my little friend Adelaide was so cross at your skating. It was fun to see her so angry."

"I saw no fun in it," Leam returned. "I only saw that she was angry with me, and impertinent, and that then you laughed at me."

"I swear to you I did not," cried Edgar earnestly. "Will you believe me? Tell me, Miss Dundas, that you exonerate me from such a charge. Tell me that you are sure I did not laugh at you."

Leam looked at him with her large luminous eyes serious, questioning. "If you say so, I must believe you," she answered slowly, "but I thought you did."

"If you could read my heart, you would know I did not," he said emphatically.

They were close on the bank now, where Mr. Dundas was walking with the rector.

"Say you believe me," Edgar almost whispered in his rich musical voice, so sweet and tender. "Say it, I beseech you! You do not know how I shall suffer else."

She looked at him again. "I do," she said in the manner of a surrender, the grave little smile which was her most eloquent expression of pleasure stealing over her face.

"Thank you," said Edgar: "now you have made me happy."

"I do not understand why," she answered with serious simplicity.

"Perhaps you will some day," he replied as her father came down to receive her, rather more content with her than he usually was, seeing that Edgar Harrowby—Major Harrowby, the possessor of the Hill and some thousands a year—had singled her out for his special attention, and had made a picture on the ice almost as pretty as an illustrated weekly.

But Edgar, not wishing to go too far in the way of provocation, nor to burn his boats behind him before he had decided on his settlement, skated off to Adelaide so soon as he had deposited Leam, and by a few judicious praises and well-administered tendernesses of voice and look succeeded in bringing her back to her normal condition of quiescent resolve and satisfaction. Then, when she was her smiling self again—for if she had frowns for many others, she had always smiles for the Harrowbys as a race, and specially for Edgar as an individual—he said, in the manner of one wishing to know the truth of a thing, "What made you so savage to Miss Dundas just now?"

"I cannot bear her," said Adelaide with energy.

"No, I see that you dislike her; but why?"

"I can hardly tell you: she has never done anything very bad, but I always feel as if she could, she is so silent, so reserved, so odd altogether."

"A woman's reason!" he laughed. "Dr. Fell over again."

"It may be," returned Adelaide coldly, "but I believe in my own instinctive dislikes. I felt the same kind of mistrust for that wretched woman who called herself Madame de Montfort, about whom papa and mamma and the whole place went mad. And after her death quite odd-enough stories came out to justify my doubts and condemn her faithful friends. Every one said she poisoned herself because she knew that she would be unmasked and she was afraid to face the ordeal. And her debts, I believe, were frightful; though it served that ridiculous Mr. Dundas right for marrying such a creature."

"But granting that this woman was an adventuress, as you say, what has that to do with Miss Dundas?"

"Nothing, of course: I only mentioned her to show you that I have some accuracy of judgment, and that when I say I dislike Leam Dundas my opinion ought to be taken as worth consideration."

Adelaide said this quietly, in the well-bred but absolutely positive manner which she would have when they were married and she differed from him in opinion. It was the moral arbitrariness of the superior being, which, amusing now in the maiden, might become wearisome, not to say oppressive, in the wife.

"Well, I do not know her as you do, of course, but I cannot see why you should dislike her so much," persisted Edgar.

"Trust me, some day it will be seen why," she answered. "I feel confident that before long Leam will show herself in her true colors, and those will be black. I pity the man who will ever be her husband."

Edgar laughed somewhat forcedly, then looked at Leam walking up the road alone, and thought that her husband would not need much pity for his state. Her beauty stood with him for moral qualities and intellectual graces. Given such a face as hers, such a figure, and all the rest was included. And when he thought of her eyes and the maddening way in which they looked into his; of the grave little smile, evanescent, delicate, subtle, the very aroma of a smile, so different from the coarse hilarity of your commonplace English girls; of the reticence and pride which gave such value to her smaller graces; of the enchanting look and accent which had accompanied her act of self-surrender just now—that acceptance of his word and renunciation of her own fancy which had put him in the place and given him the honor of a conqueror,—he accused Adelaide in his heart of prejudice and jealousy, and despised her for her littleness. In fact, he was nearer to loving Leam Dundas because of these strictures than he would have been had the rector's daughter praised her; and Adelaide,

usually so politic, had made a horribly bad move by her unguarded confession of distrust and dislike.

The whole episode, however, had been lost in its true meaning to all save one—that one the Mr. Gryce of Lionnet, who already knew what there was to be known of every family in the place, and who had the faculty of dovetailing parts into a whole characteristic of the born detective.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GREEN YULE.

THE frost broke suddenly, and was succeeded by damp, close, unseasonable weather, continuing up to Christmas, and giving the "green yule" which the proverb says "makes a fat churchyard." That proverb was justified sadly enough at North Aston, for typhus set in among the low-lying cottages, and, as in olden times, when jail-fever struck the lawyer at the bar and the judge on the bench in stern protest against the foulness they fostered, so now the sins of the wealthy landlords in suffering such cottages as these in the bottom to exist reacted on their own class, and the fever entered other dwellings beside those of the peasants.

Two of the gentry were struck down by it—Alick Corfield and the new occupant of Lionnet, that Mr. Gryce who never went to church, and who was assumed in consequence to have neither a soul to be saved by God nor a heart to be touched by man. And these were just the two who, according to the theory of the good or evil of a man's deeds returned to him in kind, had the most reason to expect exemption. For Alick had spent his strength in visiting the sick as a faithful pastor should, and Mr. Gryce had taken them material help with royal abundance. Both together they had to pay the price of principle, always an expensive luxury, and never personally so safe a card to play in the game of life as selfishness. For virtue has not only to be contented with its own reward, as we constantly hear, but has to accept punishment for its good deeds, vice for the most part carrying off the blue ribbons and the gold medals, while poor virtue, shivering in the corner, gets fitted with the fool's cap or is haled into the market-place to be pelted in the pillory. As was seen now in North Aston.

The rector, who never went into an infected cottage nor suffered a parishioner to stand between the wind and his security, kept his portly strength and handsome flesh intact, but Alick nearly lost his life as the practical comment on his faithful ministry; and Mr. Gryce, who, if he did not carry spiritual manna wherewith to feed hungry souls, did take quinine and port wine, money and comforting substances generally, for half-starved aching bodies, was also laid hold of by that inexorable law which knows nothing about providential immunities from established consequences on account of the good motives of the actors. This would have been called heresy by the North Astonian families, who professed to trust themselves to superior care, but none the less used Condy's Fluid as a means whereby the work of Providence might be rendered easier to it, nor disdained precipitate flight from the protection in which they all said dolefully they believed. But there is a wide difference between saying and doing, and men who are shocked by words of frank unbelief find faithless deeds both natural and in reason.

In spite, then, of that expressed trust in Providence which is part of the garniture of English respectability, a great fear fell on the North Aston gentry when these two of their own circle were attacked. The fever, while it had confined itself to the ill-drained, picturesque little cottages below, was lamentable enough, but not more than lamentable on the broad platform of a common humanity; and those who had lost nothing told those who had lost all that they must bear their cross with patience, seeing that it was the divine will that it should be so. Now, when the fiery epidemic had come upon the gentry face to face in their homes, it was a monster from which they must flee without delay, for no one knew whose house was safe, nor for how long his own might remain uninfected.

Mrs. Harrowby and her daughters went off to Cheltenham two days after Alick was announced as "down," to find there the security of living which had failed them here. They were people of the highest respectability — people who are the very pith and marrow of English social virtue; but they had not been touched with the divine fire of self-sacrifice for humanity, and they had no desire to hush the groans of the afflicted if they thereby ran the risk of having to gnash their own teeth. They could do no good at home. As Mrs. Harrowby said, as one propounding a self-evident paradox, how could they go and see the sick or help to nurse ploughmen and their children? They would only catch the fever themselves, and so spread it still farther. And every one knows what a wicked thing that is to do. Cook had orders to supply a certain amount of soup and wine when asked for, which was more to the purpose than any mere sentimental kindness, of no use to the one and highly dangerous to the other; and as Edgar had a great deal to do in the house and stables, it was as well, she said with the air of one undergoing something disagreeable for high principles, to get out of his way and leave him to his bricks and mortar undisturbed. Gentlemen, she said, as the clamp holding all together, do not like to be interfered with in their own domain. That fever in the bottom was such an admirable lever of womanly good sense! So they went and enjoyed themselves at Cheltenham as much as it was in the Harrowby nature to do, and even Josephine's kind heart consoled itself in the Pump-room while their miserable tenants at home sickened and died as comfortably as circumstances would allow.

The Fairbairns, too, found themselves obliged to pay a long-promised visit to London now on the instant, and swept out of the place with even more than their characteristic promptitude; and the rector would have given up his charge to a substitute if he could. But floating clerical labor was just then scarce, and he could not find any one to take his place in the Valley of the Shadow, though he offered the liberal terms which are dictated by fear. He sent away his wife and daughter, but he himself was bound to his post, and had to make the best of the bad bit of cord that held him. He used to say with his grand manner of martyrdom that, whatever he suffered, he must pull the laboring-oar to the end, and attend to the sheep committed to his charge. And he said it so often that he got at last to believe in his own devotion. All the same, that laboring-oar of his pulled nothing heavier than a cock-boat, and in waters no stormier than a duck-pond; and when his sheep had the rot he was too delicate about the hands to meddle with them. He preached to the living and he buried the dead surrounded by all the protective appliances that science has devised or money can supply. When the epidemic was over he too talked of Providence and his trust therein, and how he had been mercifully spared as his reward.

Mrs. Birkett's native indolence would have kept her at home, well fumigated and isolated, even in such a strait of fear and danger as this in which they all were, and Adelaide was racked with torment at leaving Leam unwatched and unhindered in the same place as Edgar; yet, being more afraid of the fever than even of a potential rival, she agreed with her father that in justice to themselves they ought to go now at once; and Pace, who was to remain to take care of the rector, packed up their best dresses, and sent them off with Adelaide's maid shared between them. She prophesied, however, that their things would all be spoiled before they returned, and then they would know her value. As Mr. Dundas elected to remain at home, not being afraid of infection and being tired of travel, Mrs. Birkett insisted on taking little Fina with her. This was her contribution to the sum of philanthropy and self-sacrifice in the world, and it was not despicable; for Fina was restless and only six years of age, and Mrs. Birkett was indolent and soon tired.

Thus, the whole society of the place was reduced now to the rector, Mr. Dundas and Leam, with Edgar Harrowby left

alone at the Hill. The Corfields did not count, because of Alick's illness, by which they were put in quarantine; and if Mr. Gryce at Lionnet had not been the cipher he was, his illness too would have disbarred him.

There was nothing of the saint by nature nor of the instinctive philanthropist about Leam. She was too concentrated for general benevolence, and men and women whom she did not know were little more than symbols to her. When she loved it was with her whole heart, her whole being: failing this kind of love, she had but weak affections and no curiosity, in which much of our ordinary charity consists. When the servants told her of such and such distressing circumstances, she was sorry because they were sorry, not because she realized in her own emotions the troubles she did not share or see. When prompted she sent improper things in the way of diet and useless things in the way of dress for the benefit of the poor fever patients —and she sent generously—but it never occurred to her as possible that she should go to see them in their own homes. When we read of a cyclone in China which has killed half a hundred mandarins and a small army of coolies, we realize the sorrow of the survivors no more than we realize the distress of a disturbed ant-hill; and Leam's attitude of mind toward the poor of her native village was precisely the same as ours toward the Chinese killed in a cyclone or the ants murdered in their hill.

But she went daily to Steel's Corner, because she knew the Corfields and in her own way liked Alick. Mrs. Corfield assured her there was no danger, not a particle, with her free use of disinfectants and her cunning devices of ventilation. And Leam believed her, and acted on her belief, which gave her a false look of heroism and devotion that won the heart of poor Pepita's "crooked stick" for ever. She thought it so good of the girl, so brave and unselfish; and you could scarcely have expected such nice feeling from Leam, now could you? she used to ask her husband half a dozen times a day, ringing the changes on Leam's good qualities as no one in the place had ever rung them before, and disturbing the poor doctor in his calculations on the varying strength of henbane and aconite till he wished that Leam Dundas had never been born. Mrs. Corfield was just as wrong in ascribing heroic qualities to the girl for her daily visits to ask after Alick as she had been when she had credited her with moral faults because of her intellectual ignorance. She was not afraid because she knew nothing about infection, and had therefore the boldness of ignorance, and she went daily to ask after Alick because she somehow slipped into the groove of doing so; and a groove was a great thing to conservative Leam. Nevertheless, she was really concerned at the illness of her first North Astonian friend, and wished that he would soon get well. She never thought that if he died she would be rid of the only person who knew her deadly secret. Leam was not one who would care to buy her own safety at the price of another's destruction; and, more than this, she was not afraid that Alick would betray her.

This, then, was the condition of things at North Aston at this moment: the villagers dying of fever in the bottom, the families seeking safety in flight, Leam going daily to Steel's Corner to ask after Alick and sit for precisely half an hour with Mrs. Corfield, and Edgar not so much taken up with bricks and mortar as not to understand times and habits, and therefore, through that understanding, seeing her for some part of every day. And the more he saw of her the more he yearned to see, and the stronger grew her strange fascination over him. To him, at least, the fever had not been an unmitigated evil; and though he was sometimes inclined to quarrel with the fact that Leam went daily to Steel's Corner to inquire after Alick Corfield, yet, as he got the grain and Alick only the husk, he submitted to the process by which the best was winnowed to his side. As the gain of that winnowing process became more evident he grew philosophically convinced that nothing is so charming in a woman as faithful friendship for

a sick man, and that sitting daily for half an hour, always at exactly the same time, with an afflicted mother is the most delightful act of charity to be imagined.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE BALANCE.

RIDING was one of the accomplishments brought by Leam from school, though she had never been able to thoroughly conquer either her timidity or her reluctance. Her childish days of inaction and seclusion had left their mark on her for life, and, moreover, she was not of the race or kind whence, by any process of education possible, could have been evolved a girl of the florid, fearless, energetic kind usually held as the type of the English maiden. Hence she was never quite happy on horseback, and always wondered how it was that people could be enthusiastic about riding. Nevertheless, she had learnt to sit with grace, if not with confidence, and she was too proud to show the discomfort she felt. Her father had bought for her use the showiest chestnut to be had in the market; and as he wished her to ride sometimes with him, if oftener with only the groom at her heels, and as, again, she had honestly set herself to please him, she used to mount her Red Coat, as she called her beast, punctually every other day, and carry her dislike to the exercise as the penance it was fitting she should perform. And besides all this, that devouring fever in her blood, that oppressive consciousness rather than active remembrance, lying always at the back of her life, was best soothed by long hours alone in the open air. For when she had only the groom behind her, Leam—to whom all men were as yet powers undesignated, and a man of low degree a mere animal that made intelligible sounds on occasions and was of a little more use than a dog—forgot him altogether, and was as much alone as if he had not been there.

Once or twice before the hegira of the gentry she had chanced to meet Major Harrowby in her rides, and he had turned with her and accompanied her, which was half a pain to Leam and half a pleasure. The pain was connected with her reins and her stirrups, her saddle and the girths, the restless way in which the chestnut moved his ears, the discomposing toss of his small impatient head, the snorts which frightened her as the heralds of an outbreak, and his inclination to dance sideways into the hedge rather than walk discreetly in the middle of the road, whereby her seat was disturbed and her courage tried, she all the while not liking to show that she was ill at ease. The pleasure was personal, arising from the strange sense of protection that she felt in Edgar's society and the charming way in which he talked to her. He had seen a great deal, and he had a facile tongue, and between fact and color, memory and make-up, his stories were delightful. Also, after the manner of men who seek to influence a young girl's mind and heart, he lent her books to read, and he marked his favorite passages, which he discussed afterward. They were not passages of abstract thought and impersonal sentiment, like the penciled notes in Alick Corfield's literary loans, but scenes of passion or of pathos, going straight to the heart of youth, which feels rather than reflects, or descriptions of places which were equal to pictures of human life. Under Alick's guidance she had fallen asleep over Wordsworth—under Edgar's she dreamed beneath the stars over Byron, and had heartaches without knowing why.

If they had met sometimes, and by chance, before the families went away, they met now continually, and not by chance. But as Edgar's passion and reason were not in accord, he restrained himself, for him marvelously, and neither made love to her in earnest nor flirted with her in jest. Indeed, Leam was too intense to be approached at any time with levity. As well dress the Tragic Muse in the costume of a Watteau shepherdess as ply Leam Dundas with the pretty follies found so useful with other women. She did not understand them, and it seemed useless to try to make her. If Edgar paid her any of the trivial com-

pliments always on his lips for women, Leam used to look at him with her serious eyes and ask him how could he possibly know what she was like—he, who scarcely knew her at all. If he praised her beauty, she used to turn away her head offended and tell him he was rude. He felt as if he could never touch her, never hold her: his ways were not as hers; and if her fascination for him increased, so did his trouble.

He was in doubt on both sides—for her and for himself. He could not read that silent, irresponsive nature nor measure his influence over her. By no blushes when they met, no girlish poutings when he kept away, by no covert reproaches, no ill-concealed gladness, no tremors and no consciousness could he gain the smallest clew to guide him. She was always the same—grave, gentle, laconic, self-possessed. But who that looked into her eyes could fail to see underneath her Spanish pride and more than Oriental reserve that fund of passion lying hidden like the waters of an artesian well, waiting only to be brought to the surface? He had not yet brought that hidden treasure into the light of the sun and of love, and he wondered if ever he should. And if he should, would it be for happiness? Leam was the kind of girl to love madly under the orange trees and myrtles, to break one's heart for when brothers interposed in the moonlight with rapiers and daggers and caught her away for conventual discipline or for marriage with the don; but as the mistress of an English home, the every-day wife of an English squire with a character to keep up and an example to set, was she fit for that? She was so quaint, so original, there were such depths of passionate thought and feeling side by side with such strange shallows of social and intellectual ignorance—though reticent she was so direct, though tenacious so simple, her love, if difficult to win, had such marvelous vitality when won—that he felt as if she spoke a language sweeter and purer in many of its tones than the current speech of society, but a language with which neither his own people nor that society would ever be familiar.

Amorous and easily impressed as he was, her beauty drew him with its subtle charm, but his doubt and her pride interposed barriers which even he dared not disregard; and at the end of two months he was no nearer than at the beginning that understanding which he would have established with any other pretty woman in less than a week. And he was no surer of himself and what he did really desire. Yet, accustomed as he was to loves as easily won as the gathering of a flower by the wayside, and to the knowledge that Adelaide Birkett, his social match in all things, was ready to pick up the handkerchief when he should think fit to throw it, this very doubt both of himself and Leam made half the interest if all the perplexity of the situation. He knew, as well as he knew that the Corinthian shaft should bear the Corinthian capital, if it was Leam whom he loved it was Adelaide whom he ought to marry. She would carry incense to the gods of British respectability as a squire's lady should, doing nothing that should not be done and leaving as little undone that should be done. She would preside at the Hill dinners with grace and join the meet at the coverside with punctuality; she would dress as became her position, but neither extravagantly nor questionably, and she would be more likely to stint than to squander; she would live as a polite Christian should, in the odor of genteel righteousness, not a fibre laid cross to the conventional grain, not a note out of tune with the orthodox chord. Yes, it was the rector's daughter whom he ought to marry, but it was Pepita's whom he loved. Yet how would things go with such a perplexing iconoclast at the head of affairs? Imagine the feelings of an English squire, M. H. of his county, loving dogs and horses as some women love children, and regarding poaching and vulpicide as crimes almost as bad as murder—imagine his feelings when his beautiful wife, grave and simple, should say at a hunt-dinner, "I do not like riding. I think hunting stupid and cruel: an army of men in red coats after a poor little hare—it is horrid! I think poaching

quite right. God gave beasts and birds to us all alike, and your preserves are robberies. I would like to save all the foxes, and I hate the dogs when they catch them;" for be sure she would never learn to call them hounds. What would he feel? It would be an incongruous kind of thing altogether, Edgar used to think when meditating on life as seen through the curling clouds of his cigar.

But he loved her—he loved her: daily with more passion, because daily holding a stronger check on himself, and so accumulating by concentration. It was the old combat between love and reason, personal desires and social feelings, and as yet it was undecided which side would win. Now it was Adelaide and her exact suitability for her part, when he would avoid Leam Dundas for days; now it was Leam and his fervid love for her, his passion of doubt, his fever of longing, when he would all but commit himself and tempt the fortune of the future irrevocably.

One day, during this time of sickness in the village and Edgar's lonely residence at the Hill, Leam was riding along the Green Lanes, a pretty bit of quiet country, when she heard the well-known hoofs thundering rapidly behind her, and in due time Major Harrowby drew rein at her side. "I saw you from the Sherrington road," he said, his eyes kindling with pleasure at the meeting.

Leam smiled, that pretty little fluttering smile which was so peculiarly her own, playing like a flicker of tender sunshine over her face, but she felt gladder than she showed. It was not her way to flourish her feelings like flags in the face of men. Her reticence was part of her dislike to noise and glare. "I am glad to see you," she returned quietly, her eyes raised for a moment to his.

"I sometimes fear I annoy you by joining you so often," said Edgar.

"No, you do not annoy me," Leam answered.

"It is a pleasure to know at least as much as that," he returned with a forced laugh.

"Yes? But why should you think that you annoy me?" she asked.

"Oh, perhaps you see too much of me, and so get tired of me. The thing is possible," he said, stroking his horse's ears.

Leam looked at him as she had looked before, but this time without the smile. "Are you tired of me that you say so?" she asked.

"No, no, no! How can you say such a thing—how dream it?" cried Edgar. "How could I be tired of you? Why, you are the sunshine of my life, the one thing I"—he checked himself—"I look forward to meeting," he added awkwardly.

"Then why should I be tired of you?" she returned. "You are kind to me; you tell me things I do not know; and," with maddening unconsciousness of how her words might be taken, "there is no one else."

This was the nearest approach to a compliment that Leam had ever made. She meant simply that, as there was no one else to tire her, how could her pleasant friend Major Harrowby possibly do so? But Edgar naturally took her words awry. "And if there were any one else I suppose I should be nowhere? My part has not often been that of a *pis aller*," with a deep flush of displeasure.

"Why do you say that?" she asked in a slight tone of surprise. "You would be always where you are."

"With you?"

Her face asked his meaning.

"I mean, would you always hold me as much your friend, always care for me as much as you do now—if, indeed, you care for me at all—if any one else was here?" he explained.

Leam turned her troubled eyes to the ground. "I do not change like the wind," she answered, wishing he would not talk of her at all.

"No, I do not think you do or would," returned Edgar, bending his head nearer to hers as he drew his horse closer. "I should think that once loved would be always loved with you, Miss Dundas?" He said this in a low voice that slightly trembled.

She was silent. She had a consciousness of unknown dangers, sweet and

perilous, closing around her — dangers which she must avoid she scarcely knew how, only vaguely conscious as she was that they were about. Then she said, with an effort, "I do not like myself talked of. It does not matter what I am."

"To me everything!" cried Edgar impulsively.

"You say what you do not mean," returned Leam. "I am not your sister: how, then, should it matter?"

Her grave simplicity was more seductive to him than the most coquettish wiles would have been. She was so entirely at sea in the art of love-making that her very ignorance provoked a more explicit declaration. "Are there only sisters in the world?" he asked passionately, yet angry with himself for skirting so near to the edge of peril.

"No: there are mothers," said Leam.

Edgar caught his breath, but again checked himself just in time to prevent the words "and wives," that rose to his lips. "And friends," he substituted, with evident constraint and as awkwardly as before. It was not often that a woman had been able to disconcert Edgar Harrowby so strangely as did this ignorant and innocent half-breed Spanish girl.

"And friends," repeated Leam. "But they are not much."

"Not Alick Corfield?"

"Alick Corfield? He is my good friend," she answered quietly.

"Yes, I know how much you like him." An understanding ear would have caught the sneering undertone in these words.

"Yes, I like him," responded Leam with unmoved gravity.

"And you are sorry that he is ill—very sorry, awfully sorry?"

"I am sorry."

"Would you be as pained if I were ill? and would you come every day to the Hill to ask after me, as you go to Steel's Corner to ask after him?"

"I would be pained if you were ill, but I would not go to the Hill every day," said Leam.

"No? Why this unfair preference?" he asked.

"Because I am not afraid of Mrs. Corfield," she answered.

"And you are of my mother?"

"Yes. She is severe."

"It is severe in you to say so," said Edgar gently.

"No," said Leam with her proud air. "It is true."

"Then you would not like to be my mother's daughter?" asked Edgar, both inflamed and troubled.

Leam looked him straight in the face, utterly unconscious of his secret meaning. "No," she answered, her head held high, her dark eyes proud and fixed, and her small mouth resolute, almost hard. "I would like to be no one's daughter but mamma's."

"I do love your fidelity," cried Edgar with a burst of admiration. "You are the most loyal girl I know."

She turned pale: her head drooped. "Let us talk of something else," she said in an altered voice. "Myself is displeasing to me."

"But if it pleases me?"

"That is impossible," said Leam. "How can it please you?"

Was it craft? was it indifference? or was it honest ignorance of the true motive of a man's words and looks? Edgar pondered for a moment, but could come to no definite conclusion save rejection of that one hypothesis of craft. Leam was too savagely direct, too uncompromising, to be artful. No man who understood women only half so well as Edgar Harrowby understood them could have credited such a character as hers with deception.

He wavered, then, between the alternative of indifference or ignorance. If the one, he felt bound by self-respect to overcome it—that self-respect which a man of his temperament puts into his successes with women; if the other, he must enlighten it. "Does it not please you to talk of those you like?" he asked after a short pause.

"Yes," said Leam, her face suddenly softening into tenderness as she thought of her mother, of whom Edgar did not think. "Talk to me of Spain and all that you did there."

"And that would be of what you like?" he asked.

"Of what I love," returned Leam in a low voice, her eyes lifted to his, soft and humid.

"How can I read you? What can I think? What do you want me to believe?" cried Edgar in strange trouble.

"What have I said?" she asked with grave surprise. "Why do you speak like this?"

"Are you playing with me, or do you want me to understand that you have made me happy?" he cried, his face, voice, bearing, all changed, all full of an unknown something that half allured and half frightened her.

She turned aside her head with her cold, proud, shrinking air. "I am not playing with you; and you are silly to say I have made you happy," she said, shaking her reins lightly and quickening her chestnut's uneasy pace; and Edgar, quickening the pace of his heavy bay, thought it wiser to let the moment pass, and so stand free and still wavering—in doubt and committed to nothing.

Thus the time wore on, with frequent meetings, always crowded with doubts and fears, hopes, joys, displeasures in a tangled heap together, till the drying winds of March set in and cleared off the last of the fever, which had by now worn itself away, and by degrees the things of North Aston went back to their normal condition. The families came into residence again, and save for the widow's wail and the orphan's cry in the desolated village below, life passed as it had always passed, and the strong did not spend their strength in bearing the burdens of the weak.

The greatest social event that had taken place in consequence of the epidemic was, that Mr. Dundas had made acquaintance with his new tenant at Lionnet. Full of painful memories for him as the place was, he could not let the poor fellow die, he said, with no Christian soul near him. As a landlord he felt that he owed this mark of humanity to one of whom, if nothing absolutely good was known, neither was there anything absolutely bad, save that negative misdemeanor of not coming to church. As this was not an unpardonable offence to a man who had traveled much if he had thought little, Mr. Dundas let his humanity get the upper hand without much difficulty. By which it came about that he and his new tenant became friends, as the phrase goes, and that thus another paragraph was added to the restricted page of life as North Aston knew it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONLY A DREAM.

Of all those who lived through the fever, poor Alick Corfield's case had been the most desperate while it lasted. Mr. Gryce, his fellow-sufferer, had been up and about his usual work, extracting Aryan roots and impaling Lepidoptera for a month and more, while Alick was still in bed among ice-bags and Condy's Fluid, and as bad as at the beginning—indeed, worse, having had a relapse which nothing but his wiry constitution, backed by his mother's scientific nursing, could have pulled him through. Gradually the danger passed, and this time his convalescence was solid, and, though slow, uninterrupted. He began to creep about the house by the aid of sticks and arms, and he came down stairs for the first time on the day when the Harrowbys and Birketts returned home; but he remained in strict quarantine, and Steel's Corner was scrupulously avoided by the neighbors as the local lazaretto which it would be sinful to invade. By all but Leam, who went daily to ask after the invalid, and to keep the mother company for exactly half an hour by the clock.

One day when she went on her usual errand Mrs. Corfield met her at the hall-door. "Alick will be glad to see you, my dear," she called out, radiant with happiness, as the girl crossed the threshold. "We are in the drawing-room today, as brisk and bonny as a bird: such a treat for him, poor dear!"

"I am glad," said Leam, who held a basket of early spring flowers in her hand. "Now you are happy."

Tears came into the poor mother's haggard eyes. "Happy, child! You do not know what I feel," she said with tremulous emotion. "Only a mother who has been so near to the loss of her dearest, so near to heartbreak and despair, as I have been, can know the blessed joy of the reprieve."

"How you love him!" said Leam in a half whisper. "I loved mamma like that."

"Yes, poor child! I remember," said Mrs. Corfield with compassion. She forgot that at the time she had thought the girl's love and despair, both the one and the other, exaggerated and morbid. She met her now on the platform of sympathy, and her mind saw what it brought to-day as it had seen what it had brought before, but she was not conscious of the contradiction.

"I thought I should have died too when she did. I wish I had," said Leam, looking up to the sky with dreamy love, as if she still thought to meet her mother's face in the blue depths.

"My poor dear! it was terrible for you," sighed the elder woman sympathetically. "But you must not always mourn, you know. There is a time for everything, even for forgetting, and for being happy after sorrow."

"Never a time for me to forget mamma, nor to be happy," said Leam.

"Why not?" answered Mrs. Corfield in her impatient way. "You are young, nice-looking, in tolerably good health, but you are black round your eyes today. You have friends: I am sure all of us, from my husband downward, think a great deal of you. And Alick has always been your friend. Why should you not be happy?"

Leam put the question by. "Yes, you have always been kind to me," she answered. "I remember when mamma died how you wanted to be kind then. But I did not understand you as I do now. And how good Alick was! How sorry I should have been if anything had happened to him now!" Her beautiful face grew tender with the thought. She did really love Alick in her girlish, sisterly way.

Mrs. Corfield looked at her. 'Have you never loved any one else as you loved your poor mother?" she asked.

Leam lifted her eyes. "Never," she answered simply. "I have liked a few people since, but love as I loved mamma? No!"

"Leam, I am going to ask you a straightforward question, and you must give me a straightforward answer: Which do you like best, my boy or Edgar Harrowby?" Mrs. Corfield asked this suddenly, as if she wanted to surprise the girl's secret thought rather than have a deliberate answer.

"I like them differently," began Leam without affectation. "Alick is so unlike Major Harrowby in every way. And then I have known him so long—since I was a mere child. I feel that I can say what I like to him: I always did. But Major Harrowby is a stranger, and I am— I don't know: it is all different. I cannot say what I mean." She hesitated, stopped, grew pale, glanced aside and looked disturbed; then putting on her old air of cold pride, she drew herself a few paces away and said, "Why do you ask me such a question, Mrs. Corfield? You should not."

Mrs. Corfield sighed. If Edgar was undecided between his personal desires and conventional fitness, she was undecided between her longing to see Alick happy and her dislike to his being happy in any way but the one she should design for him. He had raved a good deal during his illness, and had said many mad things connected with Leam—always Leam; and since his convalescence his mother had seen clearly enough how his heart was toward her. His pleasure when he heard that she had been there, his childish delight in anything that she had brought for him, the feverishness with which he waited to hear her step, her voice from a distance, always demanding that the doors should be left open so that he might hear her,—all betrayed to his mother as plainly as confession would have done the real thoughts of his heart, and cast a trouble into her own whence she saw no present satisfactory issue. Though she was fond of

Leam now, and grateful to her for her faithful visits during Alick's illness, yet, just as Edgar doubted of her fitness as a wife for the master of the Hill, so did she doubt of her fitness as a daughter-in-law for Steel's Corner. As a friend she was pleasant enough, with her quaint ways and pretty face; but as one of the Corfield family, bound to them for ever —what then would she be? But again, if Alick really loved her, she would not like to see him disappointed. So, what between her dislike to the marriage should it ever be, and her fear for Alick's unhappiness should he ask and be refused, the poor mother was in a state of confused feelings and contradictory wishes which did not agree with a nature like hers, given to mathematical certainties and averse to loose ends and frayed edges anywhere. As nothing more was to be got out of Leam at this moment, and as Mrs. Corfield knew that Alick would be impatient, they went into the drawing-room together, Leam carrying her basket of spring flowers for her old friend.

It was pitiful to see the poor fellow. Thin, gaunt, plainer than ever, if also ennobled by that almost saintly dignity which is given by illness, the first impression made on Leam was one of acute physical repulsion: the second only gave room to compassion. Fortunately, that little shudder of hers was unnoticed, and Alick saw only the beloved face, more beautiful to him than anything out of heaven, with its grave intensity of look that seemed so full of thought and feeling, turned to him—saw only those glorious eyes fixed once more straight on his—felt only the small hand which seemed to give him new life to touch lying clasped in his own, weak, wasted, whitened, like a dead hand for color against the warm olive of her skin. It was almost worth while to have been separated so long to have this joy of meeting; and he thought his pain and danger not too dearly bought by this exquisite pleasure of knowing that she had pitied him and cared for him.

He raised himself from his pillows as he took her small, warm, fibrous hand, and his pallid face brightened into a tearful smile. "Ah!" he said, drawing a deep breath, "I am so glad to see you again!"

"I am glad to see you too," said Leam with a certain sudden embarrassment, she did not know why, but it came from something that she saw in his eyes and could not explain even to herself.

"Are you?" He pressed her hand, which he still held. "It does me good to hear you say so," he replied.

"I have brought you some flowers," then said Leam, a little coldly, drawing away her hand, which she hated to have either held or pressed.

He took them with a pleased smile. "Our pretty wild-flowers!" he said gratefully, burying his face in them, so cool and fresh and fragrant as they were. "They are like the giver," he added after a pause, "only not so sweet."

"Do you remember when I persisted to you there were no wild-flowers in England?" asked Leam, wishing that Alick would not pay her compliments.

"Do I remember? That was the first time I saw you," cried Alick. "Of what else have I thought ever since?"

"You like wild-flowers and celandine, do you not?" asked poor Leam, desperately disturbed. "I found them in the wood as I came here."

"And picked them for me?—up in the corner there by Barton's? I know. And you went up the lane for them—for me?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Leam.

"For me?" he asked again.

"Why, yes: for whom else could it have been?" answered Leam in the tone of grave rebuke he knew so well—the tone which always expressed, "You are stupid."

Alick's lip quivered. "You are so good," he said.

"Am I?" asked Leam seriously.

Then something passed over her face, a kind of gray shadow of remembrance, and she dropped her eyes. Was she good? and could he think so?

A silence fell between them, and each knew of what the other was thinking: then Leam said suddenly, to break that terrible silence, which she felt was more betraying than even speech would have

been, "I am sorry you have been so ill. How dreadfully ill you have been!"

"Yes," he said, "I have been bad enough, I believe, but by God's grace I have been spared."

"It would have been more grace not to have let you get ill in the beginning," said Leam gravely.

Alick looked distressed. Should he never Christianize this pagan? "Don't say that, dear," he remonstrated. "We must not call in question His will."

"Things are things," said Leam with her quiet positiveness. "If they are bad, they are bad, whoever sends them."

"No. God cannot send us evil," cried Alick.

"Then He does not send us disease or sorrow," answered Leam. "If He does, it is silly to say they are good, or that He is kind to make us ill and wretched. I cannot tell stories. And all you people do."

"Leam, you pain me so much when you talk like this. It is bad, dear—impious and unchristian. Ah! can I never bring you to the true way?" he cried with real pain.

"You cannot make me tell stories or talk nonsense because you say it is religious," replied Leam, impervious and unconvinced. "I like better to tell the truth and call things by their right names."

"And you cannot feel that we are little children walking in the dark and that we must accept by faith?" said Alick.

She shook her head, then answered with a certain tone of triumph in her voice, "Well, yes, it is the dark: so let it be the dark, and do not pretend you understand when you do not. Do not say God made you ill in one breath, and in another that He is kind. It is silly."

"Now, my boy, don't excite yourself," said Mrs. Corfield, bustling into the room and noting how the thin cheek had flushed and how bright and feverish the hollow eyes of her invalid were looking, "You know the doctor says you are not to be excited or tired. It is the worst thing in the world for you."

"I am neither, mother: don't alarm yourself," he answered; "but I must have a little talk with Leam. I have not seen her for so long. How long is it, mother?"

"Well, my dear, you have been ill for over ten weeks," she said as she went to the window with a sudden gasp.

"Ten weeks gone out of my life!" he replied.

"We have all been sorry," said Leam a little vaguely.

His eyes grew moist. He was weak and easily moved. "Were you very sorry?" he asked.

"Very," she answered, for her quite warmly.

"Then you did not want me to die?" He said this with a yearning look, raising himself again on his elbow to meet her eyes more straightly.

"Want you to die?" she repeated in astonishment. "Why should I want you to die? I want you to get well and live."

He took her hand again. "God bless you!" he said, and turned his face to the pillow to conceal that he was weeping.

Again that gray look of remembrance passed over her face. She knew now what he had meant. "No," she said slowly, "I do not want you to die. You are good, and would harm no one."

After this visit Leam saw Alick whenever she called at the house, which, however, was not so often as heretofore, and week by week became still more seldom. Something was growing up in her heart against him that made his presence a discomfort. It was not fear nor moral dislike, but it was a personal distaste that threatened to become unconquerable. She hated to be with him; hated to see his face looking at her with such yearning tenderness as abashed her somehow and made her lower her eyes; hated his endeavors to convert her to an orthodox acceptance of mysteries she could not understand and of explanations she could not believe; hated his sadness, hated his joy: she only wished that he would go away and leave her alone. What did he mean? What did he want? He was changing from the blushing, awkward, subservient dog of his early youth, and from the still subservient if also more argumentative pas-

tor of these later days alike, and she did not like the new Alick who was gradually creeping into the place of the old.

When Mrs. Corfield spoke of taking him to the sea for change of air, her heart bounded as if a weight had been suddenly removed, and she said, "Yes, he ought to go," so warmly that the mother was surprised, wondering if she cared so much for him that the idea of his getting good elated her beyond herself and made her forget her usual reserve. She instinctively contrived not to see him alone now when she went to Steel's Corner during his tedious convalescence, for the poor fellow mended but slowly, if surely. Either she had only a short time to stay, and so stood for a moment, making serious talk impossible, or she took little Fina with her, or maybe she entangled Mrs. Corfield in the conversation so that she should not leave them alone, the vague fear and distaste possessing her making her strangely *rusée* and on the alert. But one day she was caught. It had to come, and it was only a question of time. She knew that, as we know when our doom is upon us.

Leam had not intended to go in to-day, but Alick, who was in the garden rejoicing in the warmth and freshness of this tender April noontide, came to meet her at the second gate, and asked her to come and sit with him on the garden-seat, there where the budding lilacs began to show their bloom, and there where they sat on that fatal day when she had hidden the little phial in her hair and bade him tell her of flowers till she tired.

She hesitated, and was on the point of refusing, when he took her by the upper part of her arm as if to hold her. "Do," he pleaded. "I want to say something to you."

"I have no time to stay," she answered, shrinking from his touch.

"Yes, yes, time enough for all I have to say," he returned. "I beg you to come with me to-day, Leam—I beg it; and I do not often ask a favor of you."

There was something in his manner that seemed to compel Leam to consent in spite of herself. True, he besought, but also he seemed almost to command; and if he did not command, then his earnestness was so strong that she was forced to yield to it. Trembling, but with her proud little head held straight —wondering what was coming, and vaguely conscious that whatever it was it would be pain—Leam let him take her to the garden-seat where the budding lilacs spoke of springtime freshness and summer beauty. Alick was trembling too, but from excitement, not from fear. He had made up his mind now, and when he had once resolved he was not wavering. He would ask her to share his life, accept his love, and he would thus take on himself half the burden of her sin. This was how he felt it. If he married her, knowing all that he knew, he would make himself the partner of her crime, because he would accept her past like her present—like her future; and thus he would be equally guilty with her before God. But he would trust to prayer and the Supreme Mercy to save her and him. He would carry no merits of devotion as his own claim, but he would have freed her of half her guilt, and he would be content to bear his own portion of punishment for this unfathomable gain. It was the man's love, but also the soul's passionate promise of sacrifice and redemption, that gave him boldness to plead, power to ask for a grace to which, had this deep stain of sin never tainted her, he would not have dared to aspire. But, as it was, his love was her greater safety, and what he gained in earthly joy he would lose in spiritual peace, while her partial forgiveness would be bought by the loss of his security of salvation. Not that she understood all this or ever should, but it gave him courage.

"When you first saw me, Leam, after my illness you said that you wanted me to live," he began in a low voice, husky with emotion. "Do you mean this?"

"Yes," she said, looking straight before her.

"Live for you?" he asked.

"For us all," she answered.

"No, not for us all—for you," he returned with insistance.

"That would be silly," said Leam quietly. "I am not the only person in the world: you have your mother."

"For my mother, perhaps; but for the world, nothing. You are the world to me," said Alick. "Give me your love, and I care for nothing else. Tell me you will be my wife, and I can live then —live as nothing else can make me. Leam, can you love me, dear? I have loved you from the first moment I saw you. Will you be my wife?"

"Your wife!" cried Leam with an involuntary gesture of repulsion. "You are dreaming."

"No, no: I am in full earnest. Tell me that you love me, Leam. Oh, I believe that you do. Surely I have not deceived myself so far. Why should you have come every day—every day, as you have done—if you do not love me? Yes, you do—I know you do. Say so, Leam, my darling, my beloved, and put me out of my misery of suspense."

"You are my good friend: I love you like a friend; but a wife—that is different," faltered Leam.

"Yes, but it will come if you try," pleaded Alick, shifting his point from confidence to entreaty. "Won't you try to love me as I love you, Leam? Won't you try to love me as a wife loves her husband?"

She turned away. "I cannot," she answered in a low voice, yet firm and distinct. It was a voice in which even the most sanguine must have recognized the accent of hopeless certainty, inevitable despair.

"Leam, it will be your salvation," cried Alick, taking her hands. He meant her spiritual salvation, not her personal safety: it was a prayer, not a threat.

"You would not force me by anything you may know?" asked Leam in the same low, firm, distinct voice. "Not even for safety, Alick."

"Which I would buy with my own," he answered—"with my eternal salvation."

"I am not worthy of such love," said Leam trembling. "And oh, dear Alick, do not blame me, but I cannot return it," she added piteously.

She saw him start and heard him moan when she said this, but for a moment he was silent. He seemed half stunned as if by a heavy blow, but one that he was doing his best to bear. "Tell me so again, Leam. Let me be convinced," he then said with pathetic calmness, looking into her face. "You cannot love me?—never? never?"

"Never," she said, her voice breaking.

Alick covered his face in his hands, and she saw the tears trickle slowly through his fingers. He made no complaint, no protestation, only covered up his face and prayed, weeping, recognizing his fate.

She was sorry and heart-struck. She felt cruel, selfish, ungrateful, but for all that she could not yield nor say that she would marry him, trying to love him. Confused images of something dearer than this as the love of her life passed before her mind. They were images without recognizable form or tangible substance, but they were the true love, and this was not like them. No, she could not yield. Sorry as she might be for him, and was, she could not promise to marry him.

"Yes," he then said after a pause, lifting up his wan face, tear-stained and disordered, but making a sad attempt to smile—"yes, dear Leam, I was, as you say, dreaming. We shall always be friends, though—brother and sister, as we have been—to the end of our lives, shall we not?"

"Yes," was her answer, tears in her own eyes and a kind of wonder at her hardness running through her repugnance.

"Thank you, darling, thank you! If you want a friend, and I can be that friend and can serve you, you will come to me, will you not? You may want me some day, and you know that I shall not fail you. Don't you know that, my royal Leam?"

"I am sure of you," she half whispered, shuddering. To be in his power and to have rejected him! It all seemed very terrible and confused to Leam, to whom things complex and entangled were abhorrent.

"ALICK COVERED HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS."

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"And now forget all this. I was only dreaming, dear. Why, no, of course you could not have married me—never could—never, never! I know that well enough now. You see I have been ill," nervously plucking at his hands, "and have had strange fancies, and I do not know myself or anything about me quite yet. But forget it all. It was only a sick fancy, and I thought what did not exist."

"I am sorry to have hurt you even in fancy," said Leam, giving a sigh of relief. "I do not like to see you unhappy, Alick. You are so good to me."

"And to the end of my life I shall be what I have been," he said earnestly. "You can trust me, Leam."

"I am sorry I have hurt you," she said again, bending forward and looking up into his face. "But it was only a dream, was it not?" pleadingly.

He smiled pitifully. "Yes, dear, only a dream," he answered, turning away his head. After a while he took her hand and looked into her face. "And now it has passed," he said, calm that she should not be sorry

PART VIII.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FRIEND OF THE FUTURE.

INSTEAD of going home when she left Steel's Corner, Leam turned up into the wood, making for the old hiding-place where she and Alick had so often sat in the first days of her desolation and when he had been her sole comforter. She was very sorrowful, and oppressed with doubts and self-reproaches. As she climbed the steep wood-path, her eyes fixed on the ground, her empty basket in her hand, and her heart as void of hope or joy as was this of flowers, she thought over the last hour as she might have thought over a death. How sorry she was that Alick had said those words! how grieved that he loved her like this, when she did not love him, when she could never have loved him if even she had not been a Spaniard and her mother's daughter!

But she did not wish that he was different from what he was, so that she might have been able to return his love. Leam had none of that shifting uncertainty, that want of a central determination, which makes so many women transact their lives by an If. She knew what she did not feel, and she did not care to regret the impossible, to tamper with the indefinite. She knew that she neither loved Alick nor wished to love him. Whether she had unwittingly deceived him in the first place, and in the second ought to sacrifice herself for him, unloving, was each a question on which she pondered full of those doubts and self-reproaches that so grievously beset her.

As she was wandering drearily onward Mr. Gryce saw her from a side path. He struck off to meet her, smiling, for he had taken a strong affection for this strange and beautiful young creature, which he justified to himself as interest in her history.

This acute, suspicious and inquisitive old heathen had some queer notions packed away in his wallet of biological speculations—notions which supplemented the fruits of his natural gifts, and which he always managed to harmonize with what he already knew by more commonplace means. He had been long in the East, whence he had brought a cargo of half-scientific, half-superstitious fancies—belief in astrology, mesmerism, spiritualism, and cheiromancy the most prominent. He could cast a horoscope, summon departed spirits, heal the sick and read the [illegible] by mesmeric force, and ev[illegible] as prophesy the fu[illegible] hand.

So at least he said, and [illegible] bound to believe that he believed in himself when he said so. He had once looked at Leam's hand, and had seen something there which, translated by his rules, had helped him on the road that he had already opened for himself by private inquiry based on the likelihood of things. Crime, love, sorrow—it was no ordinary history that was printed in the lines of her feverish little palm, as it was no ordinary character that looked out from her intense pathetic face. There was something almost as interesting here as a meditation on the mystic Nirvâna or a discourse on that persistent residuum of all myths—Maya, delusion.

It was to follow up the line thus opened to him that he had attached himself with so much zeal to his landlord, unsympathetic as such a man as Sebastian Dundas must needs be to a metaphysical and superstitious student of humanity, a born detective, shrewd, inquisitive and suspicious. But he attached himself for the sake of Leam and her future, saying often to himself, "By and by. She will come to me by and by, when I can be useful to her."

Meanwhile, Leam received his cares with the characteristic indifference of youth for the attentions of age. She

was not at the back of the motives which prompted him, and thought him tiresome with his mild way of getting to know so many things that were no concern of his. The shrewd guesses which he was making, and the terrible mosaic that he was piecing together out of such stray fragments as he could pick up—and he was always picking them up—were hidden from her; and she understood nothing of the mingled surmise and certainty which made his interest in her partly retrospective and partly prophetic, as he fitted in bit by bit that hidden thing in the past or foresaw the discovery that must come in the future. She only thought him tiresome and inquisitive, and wished that he would not [illegible] the papa.

[illegible]ge amount of that [illegible]ding which Mr. [illegible] so peculiarly his own [illegible] something unusual had happened to disturb poor Leam to-day. As she came on, so wrapped in the sorrow of her thoughts, that the world around her was as a world that is dead—taking no heed of the flowers, the birds, the sweet spring scents, the glory of the deep-blue sky, while the flickering shadows of the budding branches played over her like the shadow of the net in which she had entangled herself—she looked the very embodiment of despair. Her face, never joyous, was now infinitely tragic. Her dark eyes were bright with the tears that lay behind them; her proud mouth had drooped at the corners; she was walking as one who neither knows where she is nor sees what is before her, as one for whom there is no sun by day and no stars for the night—lost to all sense but the one faculty of suffering. She did not even see that some one stood straight in the path before her, till "Whither and whence?" asked Mr. Gryce, barring her way.

Then she started and looked up. Evidently she had not heard him. He repeated the question with a difference. "Ah! good-morning to you, Miss Dundas. Where are you going? where have you been?" he said in his soft, low-pitched, lisping voice, with the provincial accent struggling through its patent affectation.

"I am going to the yew tree and I have been to Steel's Corner," she answered slowly, in her odd, almost mathematically exact manner of reply.

"From Steel's Corner! And how is that excellent young man, our deputy shepherd?" he asked.

"Better," she said with even more than her usual curtness, and she was never prolix.

"He has been fearfully ill, poor fellow!" said Mr. Gryce, in the manner of an ejaculation.

She looked at the flowers with which the wood was golden and azure. "Yes," was her not too eloquent assent.

"And you have been sorry?"

"Every one has been sorry," said Leam evasively.

"Yes, you have been sorry," he repeated: "I have read it in your face."

He had done nothing of the kind: he had guessed it from the fact of her daily visits, and he had surmised a special interest from that other group of facts which had first set him thinking—namely, that Steel's Corner owned a laboratory—two, for the matter of that; that old Dr. Corfield was a clever toxicologist; that Leam had stayed there during her father's honeymoon; and that her stepmother had died on the night of her arrival. "And your average Englishman calls himself a creature with brains and inductive powers!" was his unspoken commentary on the finding of the coroner's jury and the verdict of the coroner. "Bull is a fool," the old heathen used to think, hugging his own superior sagacity as a gift beyond those which Nature had allowed to Bull in the abstract.

"I have known him since I was a child. Of course, I have been sorry," said Leam coldly.

She disliked being questioned as much as being touched. The two, indeed, were correlative.

"Early friendships are very dear," said Mr. Gryce, watching her. He was opening the vein of another idea which he had long wanted to work.

She was silent.

"Don't you think so?" he asked.

"They may be," was her reluctant answer.

"No, they are—believe me, they are. The happiest fate that man or woman can have is to marry the early friend—transform the playmate of childhood into the lover of maturity, the companion of age."

Leam made no reply. She was afraid of this soft-voiced, large-eyed, benevolent old man who seemed able to read the hidden things of life at will. It disturbed her that he should speak at this moment of the happiness lying in the fulfillment of youthful friendship by the way of mature love; and, proud and self-restrained as her bearing was, Mr. Gryce saw through the calmer surface into the disturbance beneath.

"Don't you think so?" he asked for the second time.

"How should I know?" Leam answered, raising her eyes, but not looking into her companion's face—looking an inch or two above his head. "I have seen too little to say which is best."

"True, my child, I had forgotten that," he said kindly. "Will you take my word for it, then, in lieu of your own experience?"

"That depends," said Leam. "What is good for one is not good for all."

"But safety is always good," returned Mr. Gryce, meaning to fall back on the safety of love and happiness if he had made a bad shot by his aim at safety from the detection of crime.

A scared look passed over Leam's face. It was a look that meant a cry. She pressed her hands together and involuntarily drew back a step, cowering. She felt as if some strong hand had struck her a heavy blow, and that it had made her reel. "You are cruel to say that. Why should I marry—?" She began in a defiant tone, and then she stopped. Was she not betraying herself for the very fear of discovery?

"Alick Corfield, for instance?" put in Mr. Gryce at a venture. "He may serve for an illustration as well as any one else," he added with a soothing kind of indifference, troubled by the intense terror that came for one moment into her face. How soon he had startled her from her poor little hiding-place! How easy the assumption of extraordinary powers based on the clever use of ordinary faculties! Your true magician is, after all, only your quiet and accurate observer. "You are not vexed that I speak of him when I want a name?" he asked, after a pause to give Leam time to regain her self-possession, to readjust the screen, to fasten once more the mask.

"Why should I be vexed?" she said in a low voice.

"He is not disagreeable to you?"

"No, he is my friend," she answered.

"And a good fellow," said Mr. Gryce, lisping over a maple twig. "Don't you think so?"

"He is good," responded Leam like a dry and lifeless echo.

"An admirable son."

"Yes."

"A devoted friend—a friend to be trusted to the death; a man without his price, incorruptible, with whom a secret, say, would be as safe as if buried in the grave. He would not give it even to the wind, and no reed on his land would whisper 'Midas has ass's ears.'"

"He is good," she repeated with a shiver. Yet the sun was shining and the spring-tide air was sweet and warm.

"And he would make the most faithful and indulgent husband."

There was no answer.

"Do you not agree with me?"

"How should I know?" she answered; and she said no more, though she still shivered.

"Be sure of it—take my word for it," he said again, earnestly.

"It is nothing to me. And I hate your word *indulgent!*" cried Leam with a flash of her mother's fierceness.

Mr. Gryce, still watching her, smiled softly to himself. His love of knowledge, as he euphemistically termed his curiosity, was roused to the utmost, and he was like a hunter who has struck an obscure trail. He wished to follow this thing to the end, and to know in what relations she and her old friend stood together—if Alick knew what he, Mr.

Gryce, knew now, and had offered to marry her notwithstanding; and whether, if he had offered, Leam had refused or accepted. Observation and induction were hurrying him very near the point. Her changing color, her averted eyes, her effort to maintain the pride and coldness which were as a rule maintained without effort, the spasm of terror that had crossed her face when he had spoken of Alick's fidelity, all confirmed him in his belief that he was on the right track, and that the lines in her hand coincided with the facts of her tragic life. Tragic indeed—one of those lives fated from the beginning, doomed to sorrow and to crime like the Orestes, the Œdipus, of old.

But if he was curious, he was compassionate: if he tortured her now, it was that he might care for her hereafter. That hereafter would come—he knew that—and then he would make himself her salvation.

He thought all this as he still watched her, Leam standing there like a creature fascinated, longing to break the spell and escape, and unable.

"Tell me," then said Mr. Gryce in a soft and crooning kind of voice, coming nearer to her, "what do you think of gratitude?"

"Gratitude is good," said Leam slowly, in the manner of one whose answer is a completed thesis.

"But how far?"

"I do not know what you mean," she answered with a weary sigh.

Again he smiled: it was a soft, sleepy, soothing kind of smile, that was almost an opiate.

"You are not good at metaphysics?" he said, coming still nearer and passing his short thick hands over her head caressingly.

"I am not good at anything," she answered dreamily.

"Yes, at many things—to answer me for one—but bad at dialectics."

"I do not understand your hard words," said Leam, her sense of injury at being addressed in an unknown tongue rousing her from the torpor creeping over her.

How much she wished that he would release her! She had no power to leave him of her own free-will. A certain compelling something in Mr. Gryce always forced her to do just as he wished—to answer his questions, stay when he stopped, follow when he beckoned. She resented in feeling, but she obeyed in fact; and he valued her obedience more than he regretted her resentment.

"How far would you go to prove your gratitude?" he continued.

"I do not know," said Leam, the weary sigh repeated.

"Would you marry for gratitude where you did not love?"

"No," she answered in a low voice.

"Would you marry for fear, then, if not for gratitude or love? If you were in the power of a man, would you marry that man to save yourself from all chance of betrayal? I have known women who would. Are you one of them?"

Again he passed his hands over her head and across and down her face. His voice sounded sweet and soft as honey: it was like a cradle-song to a tired child. Leam's eyes drooped heavily. A mist seemed stealing up before her through which everything was transformed—by which the sunshine became as a golden web wherein she was entangled, and the shadows as lines of the net that held her—where the songs of the birds melted into distant harmonies echoing the sleepy sweetness of that soft compelling voice, and where the earth was no longer solid, but a billowy cloud whereon she floated rather than stood. A strange sense of isolation possessed her. It was as if she were alone in the universe, with some all-powerful spirit who was questioning her of the secret things of life, and whose questions she must answer. Mr. Gryce was not the tenant of Lionnet, as the world knew him, but a mild yet awful god, in whose presence she stood revealed, and who was reading her soul, like her past, through and through. She was before him there as a criminal before a judge—discovered, powerless—and all attempt at concealment was at an end.

"Tell me what you know," said the soft and honeyed voice, ever sweeter,

ever more soothing, more deadening to her senses.

Leam's whole form drooped, yielded, submitted. In another moment she would have made full confession, when suddenly the harsh cry of a frightened bird near at hand broke up the sleepy harmonies and scattered the compelling charm. Leam started, flung back her head, opened her eyes wide and fixed them full on her inquisitor. Then she stiffened herself as if for a personal resistance, passed her hands over her face as if she were brushing it from cobwebs, and said in a natural voice, offended, haughty, cold, "I did not hear what you said. I was nearly asleep."

"Wake, then," said Mr. Gryce, making a movement as if he too were brushing away cobwebs from her face. After a pause he took both her hands in his. "Child," he said, speaking naturally, without a lisp and with a broader provincial accent than usual—speaking, too, with ill-concealed emotion—"some day you will need a friend. When that day dawns come to me. Promise me this. I know your life and what lies in the past. Do not start—no, nor cover your face, my child. I am safe, and so are you. You must feel this, that I may be of use to you when you want me; for you will want me some day, and I shall be the only one who can save you."

"What do you know?" asked Leam, making one supreme effort over herself and confronting him.

"Everything," said Mr. Gryce solemnly.

"Then I am lost," she answered in a low voice.

"You are saved," he said with tenderness. "Do not be afraid of me: rather thank God that He has given you into my care. You have two friends now instead of one, and the latest the most powerful. Good-bye, my poor misguided and bewildered child. A greater than you or I once said, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, because she loved much.' Cannot you take that to yourself? If not now, nor yet when remorse is your chief thought, you will later. Till then, trust and hope."

He turned to leave her, tears in his eyes.

"Stay!" cried Leam, but he only shook his head and waved his hand.

"Not now," he said, smiling as he broke through the wood, leaving her with the impression that a chasm had suddenly opened at her feet, into which sooner or later she must fall.

She stood a few moments where the old philosopher and born detective had left her, then went up the path to the hiding-place where she had so often before found the healing to be had from Nature and solitude—to the old dark-spreading yew, which somehow seemed to be more her friend than any human being could be or was—more than even Alick in his devotedness or Mr. Gryce in his protection. And there, sitting on the lowest branch, and sitting so still that the birds came close to her and were not afraid, she dreamed herself back to the desolate days of her innocent youth—those days which were before she had committed a crime or gained friend or lover.

She had been miserable enough then—one alone in the world and one against the world. But how gladly she would have exchanged her present state for the worst of her days then! How she wished that she had died with mamma, or, living, had not taken it as her duty to avenge those wrongs which the saints allowed! Oh, what a tangled dream it all was! she so hideously guilty in fact, and yet that thought of hers, if unreal and insane, that had not been a sin.

But she must wake to the reality of the present, not sit here dreaming over the past and its mystery of loving crime. She must go on as if life were a mere holiday-time of peace with her, where no avenging Furies followed her, lurking in the shadows, no sorrows threatened her, looking out with scared, scarred faces from the distance. She must carry her burden to the end, remembering that it was one of her own making, and for self-respect must be borne with that courage of despair which lets no one see what is suffered. Of what good to dream, to lament? She must live with dignity

while she chose to live. When her grief had grown too great for her strength, then she could take counsel with herself whether the fire of life was worth the trouble of keeping alight, or might not rather be put out without more ado.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAYA— DELUSION.

LEAM was not dedicated to peace today. As she turned out of the road she came upon the rectory pony-carriage—Adelaide driving Josephine and little Fina—just as it had halted in the highway for Josephine to speak to her brother.

Adelaide was looking very pretty. Her delicate pink cheeks were rather more flushed and her blue eyes darker and fuller of expression than usual. Change of air had done her good, and Edgar's evident admiration was even a better stimulant. She and her mother had ended their absence from North Aston by a visit to the lord lieutenant of the county, and she was not sorry to be able to speak familiarly of certain great personages met there as her co-guests—the prime minister for one and an archbishop for another. And as Edgar was, she knew, influenced by the philosophy of fitness more than most men, she thought the prime minister and the archbishop good cards to play at this moment.

Edgar was listening to her, pleased, smiling, thinking how pretty she looked, and taking her social well-being and roll-call of grand friendships as gems that enriched him too—flowers in his path as well as roses in her hand, and as a sunny sky overarching both alike. She really was a very charming girl—just the wife for an English country gentleman—just the mistress for a place like the Hill, the heart of the man owning the Hill not counting.

But when Leam turned from the wood-path into the road, Edgar felt like a man who has allowed himself to be made enthusiastic over but an inferior bit of art, knowing better. Her beautiful face, with its glorious eyes so full of latent passion, dreaming thought, capacity for sorrow—all that most excites yet most softens the heart of a man; her exquisite figure, so fine in its lines, so graceful yet not weak, so tender yet not sensual; as she stood there in the sunlight the gleam of dusky gold showing on the edges of her dark hair; her very attitude and action as she held a basket full of wild-flowers which with unconscious hypocrisy she had picked to give herself the color of an excuse for her long hiding in the yew tree,—all dwarfed, eclipsed Adelaide into a mere milk-and-roses beauty of a type to be seen by hundreds in a day; while Leam —who was like this peerless Leam? Neither Spain nor England could show such a one as she. Ah, where was the philosophy of fitness now, when this exquisite creation, more splendid than fit, came to the front?

Edgar went forward to meet her, that look of love surprised out of concealment which told so much on his face. Adelaide saw it, and Josephine saw it, and the eyes of the latter grew moist, but the lips of the other only closed more tightly. She accepted the challenge, and she meant to conquer in the fight.

Wearied by her emotions, saddened both by the love that had been confessed and the friendship that had been offered, this meeting with Edgar Harrowby seemed to Leam like home and rest to one very tired and long lost. The bright spring day, which until now had been as gray as winter, suddenly broke upon her with a sense of warmth and beauty, and her sad face reflected in its tender, evanescent smile the delight of which she had become thus suddenly conscious. She laid her hand in his frankly: he had never seen her so frankly glad to meet him; and a look, a gesture, from Leam—grave, proud, reticent Leam—meant as much as cries of joy and caresses from others.

"Good-morning, Miss Dundas: where have you been?" said Edgar, his accent of familiar affection, which meant "Beloved Leam," in nowise overlaid by the formality of the spoken "Miss Dundas."

"Into the wood," said Leam, her hand, as if for proof thereof, stirring the flowers.

"It is a new phase to see you given to

rural delights and wild-flowers, Leam," said Adelaide with a little laugh.

"But how pleasant that our dear Leam should have found such a nice amusement!" said Josephine.

"As picking primroses and bluebells, Joseph?" And Adelaide laughed again.

Somehow, her laugh, which was not unmusical, was never pleasant. It did not seem to come from the heart, and was the farthest in the world removed from mirth.

Leam looked at her coldly. "I like flowers," she said, carrying her head high.

"So do I," said Edgar with the intention of taking her part. "What are these things?" holding up a few cuckoo-flowers that were half hidden like delicate shadows among the primroses.

"You certainly show your liking by your knowledge. I thought every schoolboy knew the cuckoo-flower!" cried Adelaide, trying to seem natural and not bitter in her banter, and not succeeding.

"I can learn. Never too late to mend, you know. And Miss Dundas shall teach me," said Edgar.

"I do not know enough: I cannot teach you," Leam answered, taking him literally.

"My dear Leam, how frightfully literal you are!" said Adelaide. "Do you think it looks pretty? Do you really believe that Major Harrowby was in earnest about your giving him botanical lessons?"

"I believe people I respect," returned Leam gravely.

"Thanks," said Edgar warmly, his face flushing.

Adelaide's face flushed too. "Are you going through life taking as gospel all the unmeaning badinage which gentlemen permit themselves to talk to ladies?" she asked from the heights of her superior wisdom. "Remember, Leam, at your age girls cannot be too discreet."

"I do not understand you," said Leam, fixing her eyes on the fair face that strove so hard to conceal the self within from the world without, and to make impersonal and aphoristic what was in reality passionate disturbance.

"A girl who has been four years at a London boarding-school not to understand such a self-evident little speech as that!" cried Adelaide, with well-acted surprise. "How can you be insincere? I must say I have no faith, myself, in Bayswater *ingénues*: have you, Edgar?" with the most graceful little movement of her head, her favorite action, and one that generally made its mark.

"I do not understand you," said Leam again. "I only know that you are rude: you always are."

She spoke in her most imperturbable manner and with her quietest face. Nothing roused in her so much the old Leam of pride and disdain as these encounters with Adelaide Birkett. The two were like the hereditary foes of old-time romance, consecrated to hate from their birth upward.

"Come, come, fair lady, you are rather hard on our young friend," said Edgar with a strange expression in his eyes—angry, intense, and yet uncertain. He wanted to protect Leam, yet he did not want to offend Adelaide; and though he was angry with this last, he did not wish her to see that he was.

"Dear Leam! I am sure she is very sweet and nice," breathed Josephine; but little Fina, playing with Josephine's chatelaine, said in her childish treble, "No, no, she is not nice: she is cross, and never laughs, and she has big eyes. They frighten me at night, and then I scream. Your are far nicer, Missy Joseph."

Adelaide laughed outright; Josephine was embarrassed between the weak good-nature that could not resist even a child's caressing words and her constitutional pain at giving pain; Edgar tried to smile at the little one's pertness as a thing below the value of serious notice, while feeling all that a man does feel when the woman whom he loves is in trouble and he cannot defend her; but Leam herself said to the child, gravely and without bitterness, "I am not cross, Fina, and laughing is not everything."

"Right, Miss Dundas!" said Edgar warmly. "If the little puss were older she would understand you better. You

unconscionable little sinner! what do you mean? hey?" good-humoredly taking Fina by the shoulders.

"Oh, pray don't try and make the child a hypocrite," said Adelaide. "You, of all people in the world, Edgar, objecting to her naïve truth!—you, who so hate and despise deception!"

While she had spoken Fina had crawled over Josephine's lap to the side where Edgar was standing. She put up her fresh little face to be kissed. "I don't like Leam, and I do like you," she said, stroking his beard.

And Edgar, being a man, was therefore open to female flattery, whether it was the frank flattery of an infant Venus hugging a waxen Cupid or the more subtle overtures of a withered Ninon taking God for her latest lover—with interludes.

"But you should like Leam too," he said, fondling her. "I want you to love me, but you should love her as well."

"Oh, any one can get the love of children who is kind to them," said Adelaide. "You know you are a very kind man, Edgar," in a quiet, matter-of-fact way. "All animals and children love you. It is a gift you have, but it is only because you are kind."

The context stood without any need of an interpreter to make it evident.

"But I am sure that Leam is kind to Fina," blundered Josephine.

"And the child dislikes her so much?" was Adelaide's reply, made in the form of an interrogation and with arched eyebrows.

"Fina is like the discontented little squirrel who was never happy," said Josephine, patting the plump little hand that still meandered through the depths of Edgar's beard.

"I am happy with you, Missy Joseph," pouted Fina; "and you," to Edgar, whom she again lifted up her face to kiss, kisses and sweeties being her twin circumstances of Paradise.

"And with sister Leam: say 'With Leam,' else I will not kiss you," said Edgar, holding her off.

She struggled, half laughing, half minded to cry. "I want to kiss you," she cried.

"Say 'With Leam,' and then I will," said Edgar.

The child's face flushed a deeper crimson, her struggles became more earnest, more vicious, and her laugh lost itself in the puckered preface of tears.

"Don't make her cry because she will not tell a falsehood," remonstrated Adelaide quietly.

"She does not like me. Saying that she does would not be true, and would not make her," added Leam just as quietly and with a kind of hopeless acceptance of undeserved obloquy.

On which Edgar, not wishing to prolong a scene that began to be undignified, released the child, who scrambled back to Josephine's lap and hid her flushed and disordered little face on the comfortable bosom made by Nature for the special service of discomposed childhood.

"She is right to like you best," said Leam, associating Edgar as the brother with Josephine's generous substitution of maternity.

"I don't think so. You are the one she should love—who deserves her love," he answered emphatically.

"Come, Joseph," cried Adelaide. "If these two are going to bandy compliments, you and I are not wanted."

"Don't go, Adelaide: I have worlds yet to say to you," said Edgar.

"Thanks! another time. I do not like to see things of which I disapprove," was her answer, touching her ponies gently and moving away slowly.

When she had drawn off out of earshot she beckoned Edgar with her whip. It was impolitic, but she was too deeply moved to make accurate calculations. "Dear Edgar, do not be offended with me," she said in her noblest, most sisterly manner. "Of course I do not wish to interfere, and it is no business of mine, but is it right to fool that unhappy girl as you are doing? I put it to you, as one woman anxious for the happiness and reputation of another—as an old friend who values you too much to see you make the mistake you are making now without a word of warning. It can be no business of mine, outside the purest regard and

consideration for you as well as for her. I do not like her, but I do not want to see her in a false position and with a damaged character through you."

Had they been alone, Edgar would probably have accepted this remonstrance amicably enough. He might even have gone a long way in proving it needless. But in the presence of Josephine his pride took the alarm, and the weapon intended for Leam cut Adelaide's fingers instead.

He listened patiently till she ended, then he drew himself up. "Thanks!" he drawled affectedly. "You are very kind both to Miss Dundas and myself. All the world knows that the most vigilant overseer a pretty girl can have is a pretty woman. When the reputation of Miss Dundas is endangered by me, it will then be time for her father to interfere. Meanwhile, thanks! I like her quite well enough to take care of her."

"Now, Adelaide, you have vexed him," said Josephine in dismay as Edgar strode back to where Leam remained waiting for him.

"I have done my duty," said Adelaide, drawing her lips into a thin line and lowering her eyebrows; and her friend knew her moods and respected them.

On this point of warning Edgar against an entanglement with Leam she did really think that she had done her duty. She knew that she wished to marry him herself—in fact, meant to marry him—and that she would probably have been his wife before now had it not been for this girl and her untimely witcheries; but though, naturally enough, she was not disposed to love Leam any the more because she had come between her and her intended husband, she thought that she would have borne the disappointment with becoming magnanimity if she had been of the right kind for Edgar's wife. With Adelaide, as with so many among us, conventional harmony was a religion in itself, and he who despised its ritual was a blasphemer. And surely that harmony was not be found in the marriage of an English gentleman of good degree with the daughter of a dreadful low-class Spanish woman—a girl who at fifteen years of age had prayed to the saints, used her knife as a whanger, and maintained that the sun went round the earth because mamma said so, and mamma knew! No, if Edgar married any one but herself, let him at least marry some one as well fitted for him as herself, not one like Leam Dundas.

For the sake of the neighborhood at large the mistress of the Hill ought to be a certain kind of person—they all knew of what kind—and a queer, unconformable creature like Leam set up there as the Mrs. Harrowby of the period would throw all things into confusion. Whatever happened, that must be prevented if possible, for Edgar's own sake and for the sake of the society of the place.

All of which thoughts strengthened Adelaide in her conviction that she had done what she ought to have done in warning Edgar against Leam, and that she was bound to be faithful in her course so long as he was persistent in his.

Meanwhile, Edgar returned to Leam, who had remained standing in the middle of the road waiting for him. Nothing belonged less to Leam than forwardness or flattery to men; and it was just one of those odd coincidences which sometimes happen that as Edgar had not wished her good-bye, she felt herself bound to wait his return. But it had the look of either a nearer intimacy than existed between them, or of Leam's laying herself out to win the master of the Hill as she would not have laid herself out to win the king of Spain. In either case it added fuel to the fire, and confirmed Adelaide more and more in the course she had taken. "Look there!" she said to Josephine, pointing with her whip across the field, the winding way having brought them in a straight line with the pair left on the road.

"Very bold, I must say," said Josephine; "but Leam is such a child!—she does not understand things as we do," she added by way of apology and defence.

"Think not?" was Adelaide's reply; and then she whipped her ponies and said no more.

"Why does Miss Birkett hate me?" asked Leam when Edgar came back.

"Because— Shall I tell you?" he answered with a look which she could not read.

"Yes, tell me."

"Because you are more beautiful than she is, and she is jealous of you. She is very good in her own way, but she does not like rivals near her throne; and you are her rival without knowing it."

Leam had looked straight at Edgar when he began to speak, but now she dropped her eyes. For the first time in her life she did not disclaim his praise, nor feel it a thing that she ought to resent. On the contrary, it made her heart beat with a sudden throb that almost frightened her with its violence, and that seemed to break down her old self in its proud reticence and cold control, leaving her soft, subdued, timid, humble—child-like, and yet not a child. Her face was pale; her eyelids seemed weighted over her eyes, so that she could not raise them; her breath came with so much difficulty that she was forced to unclose her lips for air; she trembled as if with a sudden chill, and yet her veins seemed running with fire; and she felt as if the earth moved under her feet. What malady was this that had overtaken her so suddenly? What did it all mean? It was something like that strange sensation which she had had a few hours back in the wood, when Mr. Gryce had seemed to her like some compelling spirit questioning her of her life, while she was his victim, forced to reveal all. And yet it was the same, with a difference. That had been torture covered down by an anodyne: this was in its essence ecstasy, if on the outside pain.

"Look at me, Leam," half whispered Edgar, bending over her.

She raised her eyes with shame and difficulty—very slowly, for their lids were so strangely heavy; very shyly, for there was something in them, she herself did not know what, which she did not wish him to see. Nevertheless, she raised them because he bade her. How sweet and strange it was to obey him against her own desire! Did he know that she looked at him because he told her to do so? and that she would have rather kept her eyes to the ground? Yes, she raised them and met his.

Veiled, humid, yearning, those eyes of hers told all—all that she herself did not know, all that Edgar had now hoped, now feared, as passion or prudence had swayed him, as love or fitness had seemed the best circumstance of life.

"Leam!" he said in an altered voice: she scarcely recognized it as his. He took her hand in his, when suddenly there came two voices on the air, and Mr. Gryce and Sebastian Dundas, disputing hotly on the limits of the Unknowable, turned the corner and came upon them.

Then the moment and its meaning passed, the enchanted vision faded, and all that remained of that brief foretaste of Paradise before the serpent had entered or the forbidden fruit been tasted was the bald, prosaic fact of Major Harrowby bidding Miss Dundas good-day, too much pressed for time to stop and talk on the Unknowable.

"Disappointed, baulked, ill-used!" were Edgar's first angry thoughts as he strode along the road: his second, those that were deepest and truest to his real self, came with a heavy sigh. "Saved just in time from making a fool of myself," he said below his breath, his eyes turned in the direction of the Hill. "It must be a warning for the future. I must be more on my guard, unless indeed I make up my mind to tempt fortune and take the plunge—for happiness such as few men have, or for the ruin of everything."

Meanwhile, pending this determination, Edgar kept himself out of Leam's way, and days passed before they met again. And when they did next meet it was in the churchyard, in the presence of the assembled congregation, with Alick Corfield as the centre of congratulation on his first resumption of duty, and Leam and Edgar separated by the crowd and stiffened by conventionality into coldness.

Maya—delusion! That strange trouble, sweet and thrilling, which disturbed

Leam's whole being; Edgar's unfathomable eyes, which seemed almost to burn as she looked at them; his altered voice, scarcely recognizable it was so changed —all a mere phantasy born of a dream —all, what is so much in this life of ours, a mockery, a mistake, a vague hope without roots, a shadowy heaven that had no place in fact, the cold residuum of enthralling and bewitching myths — all Maya, delusion!

CHAPTER XXXI.

BY THE BROAD.

AFTER that scene in the pony-carriage Leam began to take it to heart that little Fina did not love her. Hitherto, solicitous only to do her duty unrelated to sentiment, she had not cared to win the child's rootless and unmeaning affection: now she longed to hear her say to Major Harrowby, "I love Leam." She did not care about her saying it to any one else, but she thought it would be pleasant to see Edgar smile on her as he had smiled at Josephine when Fina had crawled on to her lap that day of Maya, and said, "You are far nicer, Missy Joseph."

She would like to have Edgar's good opinion. Indeed, that was only proper gratitude to a friend, not unwomanly submission to the great young man of the place. He was invariably kind to her, and he had done much to make her cheerless life less dreary. He had lent her books to read, and had shown her pretty places in the district which she would never have seen but for him: he talked to her as if he liked talking to her, and he had defended her when Adelaide was rude. It was right, then, that she should wish to please him and show him that she deserved his respect.

Hence she put out her strength to win Fina's love that she might hear her say, when next Major Harrowby asked her, "Yes, I love Leam."

But who ever gained by conscious endeavor the love that was not given by the free sympathies of Nature? Hearts have been broken and lives ruined before now for the want of a spell strong enough to turn the natural course of feeling; and Leam's success with Fina was no exception to the common experience. The more she sought to please her the less she succeeded; and, save that the child grew disobedient in proportion to the new indulgences granted, no change was effected.

How should there be a change? Leam could not romp, was not fond of kissing, knew no childish games, could not enter into childish nonsense, was entirely incapable of making believe, never seemed to be thinking of what she was about, and had big serious eyes that oppressed the little one with a sense of awe not conducive to love, and of which she dreamed with terrifying adjuncts when she had had too much cake too late at night. What there was of sterling in Leam had no charm for, because no point of contact with, Fina. Thus, all her efforts went astray, and the child loved her no better for being coaxed by methods that did not amuse her. At the end of all she still said with her pretty pout that Leam was cross—she would not talk to her about mamma.

One day Leam took Fina for a walk to the Broad. It was the most unselfish thing she could do, for her solitary rambles, her unaccompanied rides, were her greatest pleasures; save, indeed, when the solitude of these last was interrupted by Major Harrowby. This, however, had not been nearly so often since the return of the families as before; for Adelaide's pony-carriage was wellnigh ubiquitous, and Edgar did not care that the rector's sarcastic daughter should see him escorting Leam in lonely places three or four times a week. Thus, the girl had fallen back into her old habits of solitude, and to take the child with her was a sacrifice of which she herself only knew the extent.

But, if blindly and with uncertain feet, stumbling often and straying wide, Leam did desire to find the narrow way and walk in it—to know the better thing and do it. At the present moment she knew nothing better than to give nurse a holiday and burden herself with an uncon-

genial little girl as her charge and companion when she would rather have been alone. So this was how it came about that on this special day the two set out for the Broad, where Fina had a fancy to go.

The walk was pleasant enough. Leam was not called on to rack her brains—those non-inventive brains of hers, which could not imagine things that never happened—for stories wherewith to while away the time, as Fina ran alone, happy in picking the spring flowers growing thick on the banks and hedgerows. Thus the one was amused and the other was left to herself undisturbed; which was an arrangement that kept Leam's good intentions intact, but prevented the penance which they included from becoming too burdensome. Indeed, her penance was so light that she thought it not so great a hardship, after all, to make little Fina her companion in her rambles if she would but run on alone and content herself with picking flowers that neither scratched nor stung, and where therefore neither the surgery of needles nor the dressing of dock-leaves was required, nor yet the supplementary soothing of kisses and caresses for her tearful, sobbing, angry pain.

The Broad, always one of the prettiest points in the landscape, was to-day in one of its most interesting phases. The sloping banks were golden with globe-flowers and marsh "mary-buds," and round the margin was a broad belt of silver where the starry white ranunculus grew. All sorts of the beautiful aquatic plants of spring were flowering—some near the edges, apparently just within reach, tempting and perilous, and some farther off and manifestly hopeless: the leaves of the water-lilies, which later would be set like bosses of silver and gold on the shimmering blue, had risen to the surface in broad, green, shining platters, and the low-lying branches of the trees at the edge dipped in the water and swayed with the running stream.

It was the loveliest bit of death and danger to be found for miles round—so lovely that it might well have tempted the sorrowful to take their rest for ever in a grave so sweet, so eloquent of eternal peace. Even Leam, with all the unspoken yearnings, the formless hopes, of youth stirring in her heart, thought how pleasant it would be to go to sleep among the flowers and wake up only when she had found mamma in heaven; while Fina, dazzled by the rank luxuriance before her, ran forward to the water's edge with a shrill cry of delight.

Leam called to her to stand back, to come away from the water and the bank, which, shelving abruptly, was a dangerous place for a child. The footing was insecure and the soil treacherous—by no means a proper playground for the rash, uncertain feet of six. Twice or thrice Leam called, but Fina would not hear, and began gathering the flowers with the bold haste of a child disobeying orders and resolved to make the most of her opportunity before the time came of her inevitable capture.

Thus Leam, walking fast, came up to her and took her by the arm in high displeasure. "Fina, did you not hear me? You must not stand here," she said.

"Don't, Leam, you hurt me—you are cross: leave me alone," screamed Fina, twisting her little body to free herself from her step-sister's hand.

"Be quiet. You will fall into the river and be drowned if you go on like this,' said Leam, tightening her hold; and those small nervous hands of hers had an iron grasp when she chose to put out her strength.

"Leave me alone. You hurt me—oh, you hurt me so much!" screamed Fina, still struggling.

"Come with me, then. Do as you are bid and come away," returned Leam, slightly relaxing her grasp. Though she was angry with the child, she did not want to hurt her.

"I sha'n't. Leave me alone. You are a cross, ugly thing, and I hate you," was Fina's sobbing reply.

With a sudden wrench she tore herself from the girl's hands, slipped, staggered, shrieked, and the next moment was in the water, floating downward with the current and struggling vainly to get

out; while Leam, scarcely understanding what she saw, stood paralyzed and motionless on the bank.

Fortunately, at this instant Josephine drove up. She was alone, driving her gray ponies in the basket phaeton, and saw the child struggling in the stream, with Leam standing silent, helpless, struck to stone as it seemed, watching her without making an effort to save her. "Leam! Fina! save her! save her!" cried Josephine, who herself had enough to do to hold her ponies, in their turn startled by her own sudden cries. "Leam, save her!" she repeated; and then breaking down into helpless dismay she began to sob and scream with short, sharp hysterical shrieks as her contribution to the misery of the moment. Poor Josephine! it was all that she could do, frightened as she was at her own prancing ponies, distracted at the sight of Fina's danger, horrified at Leam's apparent apathy.

As things turned out, it was the best that she could have done, for her voice roused Leam's faculties into active life again, and broke the spell of torpor into which horror had thrown them. "Holy St. Jago, help me!" she said, instinctively turning back to first traditions and making the sign of the cross, which she did not often make now, and only when surprised out of conscious into automatic action.

Running down and along the bank, with one hand she seized the branch of an oak that swept into the water, then plunged in up to her shoulders to catch the child drifting down among the white ranunculus. Fortunately, Fina was still near enough to the shore to be caught as she drifted by without absolute danger of drowning to Leam, who waded back to land, drawing the child with her, not much the worse for her dangerous moment save for the fright which she had suffered and the cold of her dripping clothes; in both of which conditions Leam was her companion.

So soon as she was safe on shore the child began to scream and cry piteously, as was perhaps but natural, and when she saw Josephine she tore herself away from Leam and ran up to her as if for protection. "Take me home to nurse," she sobbed, climbing into the little low phaeton and clinging to Josephine, who was also weeping and trembling hysterically. "Leam pushed me in: take me away from her."

"You say what is not true, Fina," said Leam gravely, trembling as much as Josephine, though her eyes were dry and she did not sob. "You fell in because you would not let me hold you."

"You pushed me in, and I hate you," reiterated Fina, cowering close to the bosom of her warm, soft friend.

"Do you believe this?" asked Leam, turning to Josephine and speaking with all her old pride of voice and bearing. Nevertheless, she was as white as those flowers on the water. It was madame's child who accused her of attempting to kill her, and it was the child whom she had so earnestly desired to win who now said, "I hate her," to the sister of the man to whom she longed to hear her say, "I love Leam."

"Believe that you pushed her in—that you wanted to drown dear little Fina? No!" cried Josephine in broken sentences through her tears. "She mistakes.—You must not say such dreadful things, my darling," to Fina. "Dear sister Leam would not hurt a hair of your head, I am sure."

"She did: she pushed me in on purpose," persisted the shivering child, beginning to cry afresh.

On which, a little common sense dawning on Josephine's distracted mind, she did her best to stop her own hysterical sympathy, remembering that to go home, change their wet clothes, have something warm to drink and be put to bed would be more to the purpose for both at this moment than to stand there crying, shivering and recriminating, with herself as the weak and loving judge, inclining to both equally, to settle the vexed question of accident or malice.

"Good gracious! why are we waiting here?" she cried, drying her eyes quickly and ceasing to sob. "You will both get your deaths from cold if you stand here in your wet clothes.—Come in, dear Leam, and I will drive you home at once.

—Fina, my darling, leave off crying, that's my little angel. I will take you to papa, and you will be all right directly. I cannot bear to see you cry so much, dear Fina: don't, my pet."

Which only made the little one weep and sob the more, children, like women, liking nothing better than to be commiserated because of distress which they could control without difficulty if they would.

Seating the child at the bottom of the carriage and covering her with the rug, Josephine flicked her ponies, which were glad enough to be off and doing something to which they were accustomed, and soon brought her dripping charge to Ford House, where they found Mr. Dundas in the porch drawing on his gloves, his horse standing at the door.

"Good heavens! what is all this about?" he cried, rushing forward to receive the disconsolate cargo, unloading one by one the whole group dank and dismal—Josephine's scared face swollen with tears, white and red in the wrong places; Leam's set like a mask, blanched, rigid, tragic; Fina's now flushed and angry, now pale and frightened, with a child's swift-varying emotions; and the garments of the last two clinging like cerements and dripping small pools on the gravel.

"Leam pushed me into the river," said Fina, beginning to cry afresh, and holding on by Josephine, who now kissed and coaxed her, and said, "Fina, my darling, don't say such a wicked thing of poor Leam: it is so naughty, so very naughty," and then took to hugging her again, as the mood of the instant swayed her toward the child or the girl, but always full of womanly weakness and kindness to each, and only troubled that she had to make distinctions, as it were, between them.

"What is it you say, Fina?" asked Mr. Dundas slowly—"Leam pushed you into the river?"

"Yes," sobbed Fina.

"I did not, papa. And I went in myself to save her," said Leam, holding her head very straight and high.

Mr. Dundas looked at her keenly, sternly. "Well, no, Leam," he answered, with, as it seemed to her, marked coldness and in a strange voice: "with all your unpleasant temper I do not like to suppose you could be guilty of the crime of murder."

The girl shuddered visibly. Her proud little head drooped, her fixed and fearless eyes sank shamed to the ground. "I have always taken care of Fina," she said in a humbled voice, as if it was a plea for pardon that she was putting forward.

"You pushed me in, and you did it on purpose," repeated Fina; and Mr. Dundas was shocked at himself to find that he speculated for a moment on the amount of truth there might be in the child's statement.

Cold, trembling, distressed, Leam turned away. Would that sin of hers always thus meet her face to face? Should she never be free from its shadow? Go where she would, it followed her, ineffaceable, irreparable—the shame of it never suffered to die out, its remorse never quenched, the sword always above her head, to fall she knew not when, but to fall some day: yes, that she did know.

"But you must go up stairs now," said Josephine with a creditable effort after practicality: "we shall have you both seriously ill unless you get your clothes changed at once."

Mr. Dundas looked at her kindly. "How wise and good you are!" he said with almost enthusiasm; and Josephine, her eyes humid with glad tears, her cheeks flushed with palpitating joy, sank in soul to him again, as so often before, and offered the petition of her humble love, which wanted only his royal signature to make an eternal bond.

"I love little Fina," she said tremulously. It was as if she had said, "I love you."

Then she turned into the house and indulged her maternal instinct by watching nurse as she undressed the child, put her in a warm bath, gave her some hot elderberry wine and water, laid her in her little bed, and with many kisses bade her go to sleep and forget all about everything till tea-time. And the keen relish with which she followed all these nursery details marked her fitness for

the post of pro-mother so distinctly that it made nurse look at her more than once, and think—also made her say, as a feeler—"Law, miss! what a pity you've not had one of your own!"

Her tenderness of voice and action with the child when soothing her at the door had also made Sebastian think, and the child's fondness for this soft-faced, weak and kindly woman was setting a mark on the man's mind, well into middle age as she was. He began to ask himself whether the blighted tree could ever put forth leaves again? whether there was balm in Gilead yet for him, and nepenthe for the past in the happiness of the future. He thought there might be, and that he had sat long enough now by the open grave of his dead love. It was time to close it, and leave what it held to the keeping of a dormant memory only—a memory that would never die, but that was serene, passive and at rest.

So he pondered as he rode, and told Josephine's virtues as golden beads between his fingers, to which his acceptance would give their due value, wanting until now—their due value, merited if not won. And for himself, would she make him happy? On the whole he thought that she would. She worshiped him, perhaps, as he had worshiped that other, and it was pleasant to Sebastian Dundas to be worshiped. He might do worse, if also he might do better; but at least in taking Josephine he knew what he was about, and Fina would not be made unhappy. He forgot Leam. Yes, he would take Josephine for his wife by and by, when the fitting moment came, and in doing so he would begin life anew and be once more made free of joy.

He was one of those men resilient if shallow, and resilient perhaps because shallow, who, persecuted by an evil fortune, are practically unconquerable—men who, after they have been prostrated by a blow severe enough to shatter the strongest heart, come back to their old mental place after a time smiling, in nowise crushed or mutilated, and as ready to hope and love and believe and plan as before—men who are never ennobled by sorrow, never made more serious in their thoughts, more earnest in their aims, though, as Sebastian had been, they may be fretful enough while the sore is open—men who seem to be the unresisting sport of the unseen powers, buffeted, tortured as we see helpless things on earth—dogs beaten and horses lashed—for the mere pleasure of the stronger in inflicting pain, and for no ultimate good to be attained by the chastening. The souls of such men are like those weighted tumblers of pith: knocked down twenty times, on the twenty-first they stand upright, and nothing short of absolute destruction robs them of their elasticity. As now when Sebastian planned the baselines of his new home with Josephine, and built thereon a pretty little temple of friendship armed like love.

His heart was broken, he said to himself, but Josephine held the fragments, and he would make himself tolerably content with the rivet. Still, it was broken all the same; which simply meant that of the two he loved madame the better, and would have chosen her before the other could she have come back; but that failing, this other would do, even Josephine's love being better than no love at all. Besides, she had her own charms, if of a sober kind. She was a sweet-tempered, soft-hearted creature, with the aroma of remembrance round her when she was young and pretty and unattainable: consequently, being unattainable, held as the moral pot of gold under the rainbow, which, could it have been caught, would have made all life glad. The sentimental rest which she and her people had afforded during the turbulent times of that volcanic Pepita had also its sweet savor of association that did not make her less delightful in the present; and when he looked at her now, faded as she was, he used to try and conjure back her image, such as it had been when she was a pretty, blushing, affectionate young girl, who loved him as flowers love the sun, innocently, unconsciously, and without the power of repulsion.

Also, she had the aroma of remembrance about her from another side—remembrance when she had been ma-

dame's chosen friend and favorite, and the unconscious chaperon, poor dear! who had made his daily visits to Lionnet possible and respectable. He pitied her a little now when he thought of how he had used her as Virginie's hood and his own mask then; and he pitied her so much that he took it on his conscience, as a duty which he owed her and the right, to make her happy at last. Yes, it was manifestly his duty—unquestionably the right thing to do. The petition must be signed, the suppliant raised; Ahasuerus must exalt his Esther, his loving, faithful, humble Esther; and when inclination models itself as duty the decision is not far off.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PALMAM QUI NON MERUIT.

ALL North Aston rang with the story of little Fina's peril, Josephine's admirable devotion and Leam's shameful neglect—so shameful as to be almost criminal. It was the apportionment of judgment usual with the world. The one who had incurred no kind of risk, and had done only what was pleasant to her, received unbounded praise, while the one who was of practical use got for her personal peril and discomfort universal blame. They said she had allowed the child to run into danger by her own carelessness, and then had done nothing to save her: and they wondered beneath their breath if she had really wished the little one to be drowned. She was an odd girl, you know, they whispered from each to each—moody, uncomfortable, and unlike any one else; and though she had certainly behaved admirably to little Fina, so far as they could see, yet it was not quite out of the nature of things that she should wish to get rid of the child, who, after all, was the child of no one knows whom, and very likely spoilt and tiresome enough.

But no one said this aloud. They only whispered it to each other, their comments making no more noise than the gliding of snakes through the evening grass.

As for Fina, she suffered mainly from a fit of indigestion consequent on the shower of sweetmeats which fell on her from all hands as the best consolation for her willful little ducking known to sane men and women presumably acquainted with the elements of physiology. She was made restless, too, from excitement by reason of the multiplicity of toys which every one thought it incumbent on him and her to bestow; for it was quite a matter for public rejoicing that she had not been drowned, and Josephine, as her reputed savior, leapt at a bound to the highest pinnacle of popular favor.

It made not the slightest difference in the estimation of these clumsy thinkers that the thing for which Josephine was praised was a pure fiction, just as the thing for which Leam was condemned was a pure fiction. Society at North Aston had the need of hero-worship on it at this moment, and a mythic heroine did quite as well for the occasion as a real one.

No one was so lavish of her praise as Adelaide. It was really delightful to note the generosity with which she eulogized her friend Joseph, and the pleasure that she had in dwelling on her heroism; Josephine deprecating her praises in that weak, conscious, and blushing way which seems to accept while disclaiming.

She invariably said, "No, Adelaide, I do not deserve the credit of it: it was Leam who saved the child;" but she said it in that voice and manner which every one takes to mean more modesty than truth, and which therefore no one believes as it is given; the upshot being that it simply brings additional grist to the mill whence popularity is ground out.

Her disclaimers were put down to her good-natured desire to screen Leam: she had always been good to that extraordinary young person, they said. But then Josephine Harrowby was good to every one, and if she had a fault it was the generalized character of her benevolence, which made her praise of no value, you see, because she praised every one alike, and took all that glittered for gold. Hence, her assurances that Leam had really and truly put herself into (the ap-

pearance of) actual danger to save Fina from drowning, while she herself had done nothing more heroic than take the dripping pair of them home when all was over—she forgot to add, sit in the carriage and scream—went for nothing, and the popular delusion for all. She was still the heroine of the day, and *palmam qui non meruit* the motto which the unconscious satirists bestowed on her.

She did not mean it to be so—quite the contrary—but wrong comes about from good intentions to the full as often as from evil ones. Her design was simply to be truthful, as so much conscientious self-respect, in the first instance, and to do justice to Leam in the second; but between her good-natured advocacy and Adelaide's undisguised hostility maybe the former did Leam the most harm.

The child's past danger was quite sufficient reason why Josephine should come more frequently than usual to Ford House. It was only natural that she should wish to know how the little one went on. The cold, sore throat, rheumatic fever, measles that never came, might yet be always on the way, and the woman's fond fears were only to be quieted by the comforting assurance of her daily observation. Leam did get a cold, and a severe one, but then Leam was grown up and could take care of herself. Fina was the natural charge of universal womanhood, and no one who was a woman at all could fail to be interested in such a pretty, caressing little creature. And then Sebastian Dundas loved best the child which was not his own; and that, too, had its weight with Josephine, who somehow seemed to have forgotten by now that little Fina was madame's child—false and faithless madame—and was not part and parcel of the man she loved, as also in some strange sense her own. Madame's initial dedication had touched her deeply both at the time and ever after; the likeness of name was again another tie; and that subtle resemblance to herself which every one saw and spoke of seemed to round off all into an harmonious whole, and give her a right which even Mrs. Birkett did not possess.

It was about a week after the accident when Josephine went one morning, as usual, to ask after Fina, and be convinced by personal inspection that the pretty little featherhead, the child of many loves, was well. She was met in the drawing-room by Mr. Dundas, who when he greeted her took both her hands in his in a more effusive manner than he had ever permitted himself to show since Pepita's death, save once before he had decided on madame and when Josephine had one day touched an old chord tenderly.

Holding her thus, he led her to the sofa with a certain look of purpose in his face, of loving proprietorship in his bearing, that made poor fond Josephine's foolish heart knock loudly against her ribs.

Was it then coming at last, that reward of constancy for which she had borne so much suspense, so many delays, such long dull days and tearful nights? Was the rickety idol of her whole life's worship really about to bless her with his smiles?

She cast down her eyes, trembling, blushing. She was thirty-five years of age, but she was only a great girl still, and her love had the freshness which belongs to the cherished sentiment of girlhood ripened into the confessed, patient, unchanging love of maturity.

"You have been always good to me, Josephine," began Mr. Dundas, still holding her hand.

Josephine did not answer, save through the crimson of her telltale cheeks and the smile akin to tears about her quivering mouth.

"I think you have always liked me," he went on to say, looking down into her face.

Josephine closed her hand over his more warmly and glanced up swiftly, bashfully. Was there much doubt of it? had there ever been any doubt of it?

"And I have always liked you," he added; and then he paused.

She looked up again, this time a certain tender reproach and surprise lying behind her evident delight and love.

"Had not my darling Virginie come

"'I HAVE GIVEN YOU A NEW MAMMA, FINA.'"

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between us you would have been my wife long ago," said Mr. Dundas, the certainty of her acceptance at any time of their acquaintance as positive to him as that the famished hound would accept food, the closed pimpernel expand in the sunlight. "I was always fond of you, even in poor Pepita's time, though of course, as a man of honor, I could neither encourage nor show my affection. But Virginie—she took me away from the whole world, and I lost you, as well as herself, for that one brief month of happiness."

His eyes filled up with tears. Though he was wooing his third bride, he did not conceal his regret for his second.

By an effort of maidenly reserve over feminine sympathy Josephine refrained from throwing her arms round his neck and weeping on his shoulder for pity at his past sorrow. She had none of the vice of jealousy, and she could honestly and tenderly pity the man whom she loved for his grief at the loss of the woman whom he had preferred to herself. She did, however, refrain, and Sebastian could only guess at her impulse. But he made a tolerably accurate guess, though he seemed to see nothing. He knew that his way was smooth before him, and that he need not give himself a moment's trouble about the ending. And though, as a rule, a man likes the excitement of doubt and the sentiment of difficulties to be overcome, still there are times when, if he is either very weary or too self-complacent to care to strive, he is glad to be assured that he has won before he has wooed, and has only to claim the love that is waiting for him. Which was what Mr. Dundas felt now when he noted the simplicity with which Josephine showed her heart while believing she was hiding it so absolutely, and knew that he had only to speak to have the whole thing concluded.

"And now I have only half a heart to offer you," he said plaintively: "the other half is in the grave with my beloved. But if you care to ally yourself to one who has been the sport of sorrow as I have, if you care to make the last years of my life happy, and will be content with the ashes rather than the fires, I will do my best to make you feel that you have not sacrificed yourself in vain. Will it be a sacrifice, Josephine?" he asked in a lower tone, and with the exquisite sweetness which love and pleading give to even a commonplace voice.

"I have loved you all my life," said Josephine simply; and then dissolving into happy tears she hid her face in his breast and felt that heaven was sometimes very near to earth.

Sebastian passed his arms round her ample comely form and pressed her to his heart, tenderly and without affectation. It was pleasant to him to see her devotion, to feel her love; and though he disliked tears, as a man should, still tears of joy were a tribute which he did not despise in essence if the method might have been more congenial.

"Dear Josephine!" he said. "I always knew what a good soul you were."

This was the way in which Sebastian Dundas wooed and won an honest-hearted English lady who loved him, and who, virtue for virtue, was infinitely his superior — a wooing in striking contrast with the methods which he had employed to gain the person of a low-class, half-savage Spanish girl, whom he had loved for her beauty and who took him for her pleasure; also in striking contrast with those he employed to gain Madame de Montfort, a clever adventuress, who balanced him, in hand, against her bird in the bush, and decided that to make sure of the less was better than to wait for the chance of the greater. But Josephine felt nothing humiliating in his lordliness. She loved him, she was a woman devoid of self-esteem; hence humiliation from his hand was impossible.

Just then pretty little Fina came running to the window from the garden, where she was playing.

"Come here, poppet," said Mr. Dundas, holding out his left hand, his right round comely Josephine.

She came through the open window and ran up to him. "Nice papa!" she lisped, stroking his hand.

He took her on his knee. "I have given you a new mamma, Fina," he said,

kissing her; and then he kissed Josephine for emphasis. "Will you be good to her and love her very much? This is your mamma."

"Will you love me, little Fina?" asked Josephine in a voice full of emotion, taking the child's fair head between her hands. "Will you like me to be your mamma?"

"Yes," cried Fina, clapping her hands. "I shall like a nice new mamma instead of Leam. I hate Leam: she is cross and has big eyes."

"Oh, we must not hate poor Leam," remonstrated Josephine tenderly.

"I cannot understand the child's aversion," said Mr. Dundas in a half-musing, half-suspicious way. "Leam seems to be all that is good and kind to her, but nothing that she does can soften the little creature's dislike. It must be natural instinct," he added in a lower voice.

"Yes, perhaps it is," assented Josephine, who would have answered, "Yes, perhaps it is," to anything else that her lover might have said.

"Where is Leam, my little Fina? Do you know?" asked Sebastian of the child.

"In the garden. She is coming in," answered Fina; and at the word Leam passed before the window as Fina had done.

"Leam, my child, come in: I want to speak to you," said her father, with unwonted kindness; and Leam, too, as Fina had done before her, passed through the open window and came in.

The two middle-aged lovers were still sitting side by side and close together on the sofa. Fina was on her stepfather's knee, caressing his hand and Josephine's, which were clasped together on her little lap, while his other arm encircled the substantial waist of his promised bride, whose disengaged hand rested on his shoulder.

"Leam," said the father, "I have given you—"

He stopped. The name which he was about to utter, with all its passionate memories, was left unsaid. He remembered in time Leam's former renunciation of the new mamma whom he had once before proposed.

"I have asked Josephine Harrowby to be my wife," he said after a short pause. "She has consented, and made me very happy. Let me hope that it will make you happy too."

He spoke with forced calmness and something of sternness under his apparent serenity. In heart he was troubled, remembering the past and half fearing the future. How would she bear herself? Would she accept his relations pleasantly, or defy and reject as before?

Leam looked at the triad gravely. It was a family group with which she felt that she had no concern. She was outside it—as much alone as in a strange country. She knew in that deepest self which does not palm and lie to us that all her efforts to put herself in harmony with her life were in vain. Race, education and that fearful memory stood between her and her surroundings, and she never lost the perception of her loneliness save when she was with Edgar. At this moment she looked on as at a picture of love and gladness with which she had nothing in common; nevertheless, she accepted what she saw, and if not expansive—which was not her way—was, as her father said afterward, "perfectly satisfactory." She went up to the sofa slowly and held out her hand. "You are welcome," she said gravely to Josephine, but the contempt which she had always had for her father, though she had tried so hard of late to wear it down, surged up afresh, and she could not turn her eyes his way. What a despicable thing that must be, she thought—that thing he called his heart—to shift from one to the other so easily! To her, the keynote of whose character was single-hearted devotion, this facile, fluid love, which could be poured out with equal warmth on every one alike, was no love at all. It was a degraded kind of self-indulgence for which she had no respect; and though she did not feel for Josephine as she had felt for madame—as her mother's enemy—she despised her father even more now than before.

Also a rapid thought crossed her mind, bringing with it a deadly trouble. "If Josephine was her stepmother, would

Major Harrowby be her stepfather?" They were brother and sister, and she had an idea that the family followed the relations of its members. She did not know why, but she would rather not have Major Harrowby for her stepfather or for any relation by law. She preferred that he should be wholly unconnected with her—just her friend unrelated: that was all.

"Thank you, dear Leam!" said Josephine gratefully; and Leam, looking at her with large mournful eyes, said in a soft but surprised tone of voice, "Thank me! —why?"

"That you accept me as your stepmother so sweetly, and do not hate me for it," said Josephine.

Leam glanced with a pained look at Fina. "I have done with hate," she answered. "It is not my business what papa likes to do."

"Sensible at last!" cried Mr. Dundas with a half-mocking, half-kindly triumph in his voice.

Leam turned pale. "But you must not think that *I* forget mamma as you do," she said with emphasis, her lip quivering.

"No, dear Leam, I would be the last to wish that you should forget your own mamma for me," said Josephine humbly. "Only try to love me a little for myself, as your friend, and I will be satisfied. Love always your own mamma, but me too a little."

"You are good," said Leam softly, her eyes filling with tears. "I do like you very much; but mamma—there is only one mother for me. None of papa's wives could ever be mamma to me."

"But friend?" said Josephine, half sobbing.

"Friend? yes," returned Leam; and for the first time in her life she bent her proud little head and kissed Josephine on her cheek. "And I will be good to you," she said quietly, "for you are good." She did not add, "And Edgar's sister."

The families approved of this marriage. Every one said it was what ought to have been when Pepita died, and that Mr. Dundas had missed his way and lost his time by taking that doubtful madame meanwhile. Adelaide and her mother were especially congratulatory; but, though the rector said he was glad for the sake of poor Josephine, who had always been a favorite of his, yet he could not find terms of too great severity for Sebastian. For a man to marry three times—it was scarcely moral; and he wondered at the Harrowbys for allowing one of their own to be the third venture. And then, though Josephine was a good girl enough, she was but a weak sister at the best; and to think of any man in his senses taking her as the successor of that delightful and superior madame!

Mrs. Birkett dissented from these views, and said it would keep the house together and be such a nice thing for Fina and Leam: both would be the better for a woman's influence and superintendence, and Josephine was very good.

"Yes," said the rector with his martial air—"good enough, I admit, but confoundedly slow."

To Edgar, Adelaide expressed herself with delightful enthusiasm. She was not often stirred to such a display of feeling. "It is *the* marriage of the county," she said with her prettiest smile—"the very thing for every one."

"Think so?" was his reply, made by no means enthusiastically. "If Joseph likes it, that is all that need be said; but it is a marvel to me how she can—such an unmanly creature as he is! such a muff all through!"

"Well, I own he would not have been my choice exactly," said Adelaide with a nice little look. "I like something stronger and more decided in a man; but it is just as well that we all do not like the same person; and then, you see, there are Leam and the child to be considered. Leam is such an utterly unfit person to bring up Fina: she is ruining her, indeed, as it is, with her capricious temper and variable moods; and dear Josephine's quiet amiability and good sense will be so valuable among them. I think we ought to be glad, as Christians, that such a chance is offered them."

"Whatever else you may be, at least

you are no hypocrite," said Edgar with a forced smile that did not look much like approbation.

She chose to accept it simply. "No," she answered quite tranquilly, "I am not a hypocrite."

"At all events, you do not disguise your dislike to Leam Dundas," he said.

"No: why should I? I confess it honestly, I do not like her. The daughter of such a woman as her mother was; up to fifteen years of age a perfect savage; a heathen with a temper that makes me shudder when I think of it; capable of any crime. No, don't look shocked, Edgar: I am sure of it. That girl could commit murder; and I verily believe that she did push Fina into the water, as the child says, and that if Josephine had not got there in time she would have let her drown. And if I think all this, how can I like her?"

"No, if you think all this, as you say, you cannot like her," replied Edgar coldly. "I don't happen to agree with you, however, and I think your assumptions monstrous."

"You are not the first man blinded by a pair of dark eyes, Edgar," said Adelaide with becoming mournfulness. "It makes me sorry to see such a mind as yours dazzled out of its better sense, but you will perhaps come right in time. At all events, Josephine's marriage with Mr. Dundas will give you a kind of fatherly relation with Leam that may show you the truth of what I say."

"Fatherly relation! what rubbish!" cried Edgar, irritated out of his politeness.

Adelaide smiled. "Well, you would be rather a young father for her," she answered. "Still, the character of the relation will be, as I say, fatherly."

Edgar laughed impatiently.

"Society will accept it in that light," said Adelaide gravely, glad to erect even this barrier of shadows between the man of her choice and the girl whom she both dreaded and disliked.

And she was right in her supposition. Brother and sister marrying daughter and father would not be well received in a narrow society like North Aston, where the restrictions of law and elemental morality were supplemented by an adventitious code of denial which put Nature into a strait waistcoat and shackled freedom of action and opinion with chains and bands of iron. Perhaps it was some such thought as this on his own part that made Edgar profess himself disgusted with this marriage, and declare loudly that Sebastian Dundas was not worthy of such a girl as Josephine. His hearers smiled in their sleeves when he said so, and thought that Josephine Harrowby, thirty-five years of age, fat and freckled, was not so far out in her running to have got at last—they always put in "at last"—the owner of Ford House. It was more than she might have expected, looking at things all round; and Edgar was as unreasonable as proud men always are. With the redundancy of women as we have it in England, happy the head of the house who can get rid of his superfluous petticoats anyhow in honor and sufficiency. This was the verdict of society on the affair—the two extremities of the line wherefrom the same fact was viewed.

As for Josephine herself, dear soul! she was supremely happy. It was almost worth while to have waited so long, she thought, to have such an exquisite reward at last. She went back ten years in her life, and grew quite girlish and fresh-looking, and what was wanting in romance on Sebastian's part was made up in devotion and adoration on hers.

Sebastian himself took pleasure in her happiness, her adoration, the supreme content of her rewarded love. It made him glad to think that he had given so good a creature so much happiness; and he warmed his soul at his rekindled ashes as a philosophic widower generally knows how.

Only Leam began to look pitifully mournful and desolate, and to shrink back into a solitude which Edgar never invaded, and whence even Alick was banished; and Edgar was irritable, unpleasant, moody, would take no interest in the approaching marriage, and, save that his settlements on Josephine were liberal, seemed to hold himself person-

ally aggrieved by her choice, and conducted himself altogether as if he had been injured somehow thereby, and his wishes disregarded.

He was very disagreeable, and caused Joseph many bitter hours, till at last he took a sudden resolution, and to the relief of every one at the Hill went off to London, promising to be back in time for "that little fool's wedding with her sentimental muff," as he disrespectfully called his sister and Sebastian Dundas, but giving no reason why he went, and taking leave of no one — not even of Adelaide, nor yet of Leam.

PART IX.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUR MARRIAGE.

NOT the youngest or prettiest bride could have excited more interest on her launch into the unknown shoals and quicksands of matrimony than did many-fleshed, mature and freckled Josephine on the achievement of her long-desired union with the twice-told widower. A marriage of one of their own set was a rare event altogether to the North Astonians, and the marriage of one of the Hill girls was above all a circumstance that touched the heart of the place as nothing else could touch it—one which even Carry Fairbairn on the day of her triumph over willow-wearing and that faithless Frank had not come near. It was "our marriage" and "our bride," and each member of the community took a personal interest in the proceedings, and felt implicated in the subsequent failure or success of the venture.

Of course they all confessed that it was a bold thing for Miss Josephine to be the third wife of a man—some of the more prudish pursed their lips and said they wondered how she could, and they wondered yet more how Mrs. Harrowby ever allowed it, and why, if Mr. Dundas must marry again (but they thought he might be quiet now), he had not taken a stranger, instead of one who had been mixed up as it were with his other wives—but seeing that her day was passed, the majority, as has been said, held that she was in the right to take what she could get, and to marry even as a third wife was better than not to marry at all. And then the neighborhood knew Sebastian Dundas, and knew that although he had been foolish and unfortunate in his former affairs, there was no harm in him. If his second wife had died mysteriously, North Aston was generous enough not to suppose that he had poisoned her; and who could wonder at that dreadful Pepita having a stroke, sitting in the sun as she did on such a hot day, and so fat as she was? So that Mr. Dundas was exonerated from the suspicion of murder in either case, if credited with an amount of folly and misfortune next thing to criminal; and "our marriage" was received with approbation, the families sending tribute and going to the church as the duty they owed a Harrowby, and to show Sebastian that they considered he had done wisely at last, and chosen as was fitting.

There was a little mild waggery about the future name of Ford House, and the bolder spirits offered shilling bets that it would be rechristened "Josephine Lodge" before the year was out. But save this not very scorching satire, which also was not too well received by the majority, as savoring of irreverence to consecrated powers, the country looked on in supreme good-humor, and the day came in its course, finding as much social serenity as it brought summer sunshine.

It was a pretty wedding, and everybody said that everybody looked very nice; which is always comforting to those whose souls are stitched up in their flounces, and whose happiness and self-respect rise or fall according to the becomingness of their attire. The village school-children lining the church-walk strewed flowers for the bride's material and symbolic path. Dressed in a mixture of white, scarlet and blue, they made a brilliant show of color, and gave a curious suggestion of so many tricolored flags set up along the path; but they added to the general gayety of the scene, and they themselves thought Miss Josephine's wedding surely as grand as the queen's.

There were five bridesmaids, including little Fina, whom kindly Josephine had specially desired should bear her part in the pageant which was to give her a mother and a friend. The remaining four were the two Misses Harrowby

Adelaide Birkett, as her long-time confidante, and that other step-daughter, more legitimate if less satisfactory than Fina—Leam.

The first three of these four elder maids came naturally and of course: the last was the difficulty. When first asked, Leam had refused positively—for her quite vehemently—to have hand or part in the wedding. It brought back too vividly the sin and the sorrow of the former time; and she despised her father's inconstancy of heart too much to care to assist at a service which was to her the service of folly and wickedness in one.

She said, "No, no: I will not come. I, bridesmaid at papa's wedding! bridesmaid to his third wife! No, I will not!" And she said it with an insistance, an emphasis, that seemed immovable, and all the more so because it was natural.

But Josephine pleaded with her so warmly—she was evidently so much in earnest in her wish, she meant to be so good and kind to the girl, to lift her from the shadows and place her in the sunshine of happiness—that Leam was at last touched deeply enough to give way. She had come now to recognize that fidelity to be faithful need not be churlish; and perhaps she was influenced by Josephine's final argument. For when she had said "No, I cannot come to the wedding," for about the fourth time, Josephine shot her last bolt in these words: "Oh, dear Leam, do come. I am sure Edgar will be hurt and displeased if you are not one of my bridesmaids. He will think you do not like the connection, and you know what a proud man he is: he will be so vexed with me."

On which Leam said gravely, "I would not like to hurt or displease Major Harrowby; and I do not like or dislike the connection;" adding, after a pause, and putting on her little royal manner, "I will come."

Josephine's honest heart swelled with the humble gratitude of the self-abased. "Good Leam! dear girl!" she cried, kissing her with tearful eyes and wet lips—poor Leam! who hated to be kissed, and who had by no means intended that her grave caress on the day of betrothal should be taken as a precedent and acted on unreservedly. And after she had kissed her frequently she thanked her again effusively, as if she had received some signal grace that could hardly be repaid.

Her excess chilled Leam of course, but she held to her promise; and Josephine augured all manner of happy eventualities from the fact that her future step-daughter had yielded so sweetly on the first difference of desire between them, and had let herself be kissed with becoming patience. It was a good omen for the beginning of things; and all brides are superstitious—Josephine perhaps more so than most, in that she was more loving and more in love than most.

Yes, it was a pretty wedding, as they all said. The bride in the regulation white and pearls looked, if not girlish, yet comely and suitable to the bridegroom with his gray hair and sunburnt skin. The two senior maids had stipulated for a preponderance of warm rose-color in the costumes, which suited every one. It threw a flush on their faded elderliness which was not amiss, and did the best for them that could be done in the circumstances; it brought out into lovely contrast, the contrast of harmonies, Adelaide Birkett's delicate complexion, fair flaxen braids and light-blue eyes; it burnt like flame in Leam's dark hair, and made her large transcendent eyes glow as if with fire; while the little one looked like a rose, the white and crimson petals of which enclosed a laughing golden-headed fairy.

It was admirable all through, and did credit to the generalizing powers of the Hill, which had thus contrived to harmonize the three stages of womanhood and to offend none. Even Frank's fastidious taste was satisfied. So was Mrs. Frank's, who knew how things ought to be done. And as she was the rather elderly if very wealthy daughter of a baronet, who considered that she had married decidedly beneath herself in taking Frank Harrowby, the untitled young barrister not even yet in silk, she had come down to the Hill prepared to criticise

sharply; so that her approbation carried weight and ensured a large amount of satisfaction. Edgar, however, who was not so fastidious as his brother, thought the whole thing a failure and that no one looked even tolerable.

As he had his duty to do by his sister, being the father who gave her away, he was fully occupied; but his eyes wandered more than once to the younger two of the bridesmaids proper—those two irreconcilables joined for the first time in a show of sisterhood and likeness—and whom he examined and compared as so often before, with the same inability to decide which.

He paid little or no attention to either. He might have been a gray-headed old sage for the marvelous reticence of his demeanor, devoting himself to his duties and the dowagers with a persistency of good-breeding, to say the least of it, admirable. At the breakfast-table he was naturally separated from both these fair disturbers of his lordly peace, Leam having been told off to Alick, and Adelaide handed over to Frank's fraternal care, with Mrs. Frank, who claimed more than a fee-simple in her husband, watching them jealously and interrupting them often.

That wind which never blows so ill that it brings no good to any one had brought joy to Alick in this apportionment of partners, if the sadness of boredom to poor Leam. The natural excitement of a wedding, which stirs the coldest, had touched even the chastened pulses of the pale, gaunt curate, and he caught himself more than once wondering if he could ever win the young queen of his boyish fancy to return the deep love of his manhood—love which was so true, so strong, so illimitable, it seemed as if it must by the very nature of things compel its answer.

That answer was evidently not in the course of preparation to-day, for Leam had never been more laconic or more candidly disdainful than she was now; and what sweetness the pomegranate flower might hold in its heart was certainly not shaken abroad on the surrounding world. She answered when she was spoken to, because even Leam felt the constraining influences of society, but her eyes, like her manner, said plainly enough, "You tire me: you are stupid."

Not that either her eyes or her manner repelled her uncomfortable adorer. Alick was used to her disdain, and even liked it as her way, as he would have liked anything else that had been her way. He was content to be her footstool if it was her pleasure to put her foot on him, and he would have knotted any thong of any lash that she had chosen to use. Whatever gave her pleasure rejoiced him, and he had no desire for himself that might be against her wishes. Nevertheless, he yearned at times, when self would dominate obedience, that those wishes of hers should coincide with his desires, and that before the end came he might win her to return his love.

But what can be hoped from a girl, not a coquette, who is besieged on the one side by an awkward and ungainly admirer, when directly opposite to her is the handsome hero for whose love her secret heart, unknown to herself, is crying, and who has withdrawn himself for the time from smiles and benevolence? Leam somehow felt as if every compliment paid to her by Alick was an offence to Edgar; and she repelled him, blushing, writhing, uncomfortable, but adoring, with a coldness that nothing could warm, a stony immobility that nothing could soften, because it was the coldness of fidelity and the immobility of love.

Edgar saw it all. It put him somewhat in better humor with himself, but made him indignant with the Reverend Alexander, as he generally called Alick when he spoke of him wishing to suggest disrespect. He held him as a poacher beating up his preserves; and the gentlemen of England have scant mercy for poachers, conscious or unconscious. Meanwhile, nothing could be more delightfully smooth and successful than the whole thing was on the outside. The women looked nice, the men were gallant, the mature but comely bride was so happy that she seemed to radiate happiness on all around her, and the elderly bridegroom was marvelously vitalized for

a man whose heart was broken, and only at the best riveted. Edgar performed his duties, as has been said, with heroic constancy; Mrs. Harrowby did not weep nor bemoan herself as a victim because one of her daughters had at last left the maternal wing for a penthouse of her own; Adelaide talked to Frank with graceful discretion, mindful of his owner watching her property jealously from the other side of the way; Leam was — Leam in her more reserved mood if Alick was too manifestly adoring; and the families admitted acted like a well-trained chorus, and carried on the main thread to lower levels without a break. So time and events went on till the moment came for that fearful infliction — the wedding-breakfast toast prefaced by the wedding-breakfast speech.

This naturally fell to the lot of Mr. Birkett to propose and deliver, and after a concerted signaling with Edgar he rose to his feet and began his oration. He proposed "the health of the fair bride and her gallant groom," both of whom, after the manner of such speeches, he credited with all the virtues under heaven, and of whom each was the sole proper complement of the other to be found within the four seas. He was so far generous in that he did not allude to that fascinating second whom Mr. Dundas had taken to his bosom nearly five years ago now, and whose tragical death had cut him to the heart almost as much as it had wounded Sebastian. At one time natural masculine malice had made him compose a stinging little allusion that should carry poison, as some flowers do, sheathed and sugared; but the gentleman's better taste prevailed, and for Josephine's sake he brushed away the gloomy shadow of the grave which he had thrown for his own satisfaction over the orange-blossoms. He rose to the joyous height of the occasion, and his speech was a splendid success and gave satisfaction to every one alike. But what he did say was, that he supposed the master of the Hill would soon be following the example of his brother-in-law, and cause the place to be glad in the presence of a young Mrs. Harrowby, who would do well if she had half the virtues of the lady who had so long held the place of mistress there. And when he said this he looked at Edgar with a paternal kind of roguishness that really sat very well on his handsome old face, and that every one took to mean Adelaide.

Edgar laughed and showed his square white teeth while the rector spoke, blushing like a girl, but in all save that strange, unusual flush he bore himself as if it was a good joke of Mr. Birkett's own imagining, and one with which he had personally nothing to do. More than one pair of eyes watched to see if he would look at Adelaide as the thong for the rector's buckle; and Adelaide watched on her own account to see if he would look at Leam or at her. But Edgar kept his eyes discreetly guided, and no one caught a wandering glance anywhere: he merely laughed and put it by as a good joke, looking as if he had devoted himself to celibacy for life, and that the Hill would never receive another mistress than the one whom it had now.

"I wonder if the rector means Miss Birkett?" blundered Alick as his commentary in a low voice to Leam.

Leam turned pale: then with an effort she answered coldly, "Why wonder at what you cannot know? It is foolish."

And Alick was comforted, because if she had rebuked she had at the least spoken to him.

The breakfast soon after this came to an end, and in due time the guests were all assembled in the drawing-room, waiting for the departure of the newly-married pair. Here Edgar might have made some amends to the two bridesmaids whom he had neglected with such impartiality of coldness, such an equal division of doubt, but he did not. He still avoided both as if each had offended him, and made them feel that he was displeased and had intentionally overlooked them.

Each girl bore his neglect in a manner characteristic of herself. Adelaide showed nothing, unless indeed it was that her voice was smoother and her speech sharper than usual, while her smiles were more frequent if less real. But then it was he-

roic in her to speak and smile at all when she was verily in torture. Nothing short of the worship due to the great god Society could have made her control herself so admirably; but Adelaide was a faithful worshiper of the divine life of conventionality, and she had her reward. Leam showed nothing, at least nothing directly overt. Perhaps her demeanor was stiller, her laconism curter, her distaste to uninteresting companionship and current small-talk more profound, than usual; but no one seemed to see the deeper tinge of her ordinary color, and she passed muster, for her creditably. In her heart she thought it all weariness of the flesh and spirit alike, and wished that people would marry without a wedding if they must marry at all.

She had not the slightest idea why she felt so miserable when every one else was so full of the silliest laughter. It never occurred to her that it was because Edgar had not spoken to her; but once she confessed to herself that she wished she was away out of all this, riding through the green lanes, with Major Harrowby riding fast to join her. Even if her chestnut should prance and dance and make her feel uncomfortable about the pommel and the reins, it would be better than this. A heavy meal of meat and wine, and that horrible cake in the middle of the day, were stupid, thought ascetic Leam. She had never felt anything so dreary before. How glad she would be when her father and Josephine went away, and she might go back to Ford House and be alone! As for the evening, she did not know that she would show herself then at all. There was to be a ball, and though it would be pleasant to dance, she felt so dull and wretched now she half thought she would send an excuse. But perhaps Major Harrowby would be more at liberty in the evening than he was now, and would find it possible to dance with her, at least once. He danced so well! Indeed, he was the only partner whom she cared to have, and she hoped therefore that he would dance with her if she came.

And thinking this, she resolved in her own mind that she would come, and unconsciously raised her eyes to Edgar with a look of such intensity, and as it seemed to him such reproach, that it startled him as much as if she had called him by his name and asked him sadly, Why?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IS THIS LOVE?

It seemed as if the evening was to bring no more satisfaction to the three whom the morning had so greatly disturbed than had that morning itself. Edgar avoided the two girls at the ball as much as he had avoided them at the breakfast, dancing only once with each, and not making even that one dance pleasant. Under cover of brotherly familiarity he teased Adelaide till she had the greatest difficulty in keeping her temper; while he was so preternaturally respectful to Leam, whom he wished he had not been forced to respect at all, that it seemed as if they had met tonight for the first time, and were not quite so cordial as sympathetic strangers would have been.

It was only a quadrille that they were dancing, a stupid, silent, uninteresting set of figures which people go through out of respect for ancient usage, and for which no one cares. Leam would have refused to take part in it at all had any one but Major Harrowby asked her. But he was different from other men, she thought; and it became her to say "Yes" when he said "Will you?" if only because he was the master of the house.

Leam had made considerable progress in her estimate of the proprieties. The unseen teacher who had informed her of late was apparently even more potent than those who had first broken up the fallow ground at Bayswater, and taught her that *las cosas de España* were not the things of the universe, and that there was another life and mode of action besides that taught by mamma.

But when Leam thoroughly understood the master's mood, and thus made it clear to herself that the evening's formality was simply a continuance of the morning's avoidance, after looking at him once

with one of those profound looks of hers which made him almost beside himself, she set her head straight, turned her eyes to the floor, and lapsed into a silence as unbroken as his own. She was too proud and shy to attempt to conciliate him, but she wondered why he was so changed to her. And then she wondered, as she had done this morning, why she was so unhappy to-night. Was it because her father had married Josephine Harrowby? Why should that make her sad? She did not think now that her mother was crying in heaven because another woman was in her place; and for herself it made no difference whether there was a step-mother at home or no. She could not be more lonely than she was; and with Josephine at the head of affairs she would have less responsibility. No, it was not that which was making her unhappy; and yet she was almost as miserable to-night as she had been when madame was brought home as papa's wife, and her fancy gave her mamma's beloved face weeping there among the stars—abandoned by all but herself, forsaken even by the saints and the angels.

Everything to-night oppressed her. The lights dazzled her with what seemed to her their hard and cruel shine; the passing dancers radiantly clad and joyous made her giddy and contemptuous; the flower-scents pouring through the room from the plants within and from the gardens without gave her headache; the number of people at the ball—people whom she did not know and who stared at her, people whom she did know and who talked to her—all overwhelmed as well as isolated her. She seemed to belong to no one, now that Edgar had let her slip from his hands so coldly—not even to Mrs. Corfield, who had brought her, nor yet to her faithful friend and guardian Alick, who wandered round and round about her in circles like a dog, doing his best to make her feel befriended and to clear her dear face of some of its sadness. Doing his best too, with characteristic unselfishness, to forget that he loved her if it displeased her, and to convince her that he had only dreamed when he had said those rash words when the lilacs were first budding in the garden at Steel's Corner.

It was quite early in the evening when Edgar danced this uninteresting "square" with Leam, whom then he ceremoniously handed back to Mrs. Corfield, as if this gathering of friends and neighbors in the country had been a formal assemblage of strangers in a town.

"I hope you are not tired with this quadrille," he said as he took her across the room, not looking at her.

"It was dull, but I am not tired," Leam answered, not looking at him.

"I am sorry I was such an uninteresting partner," was his rejoinder, made with mock simplicity.

"A dumb man who does not even talk on his fingers cannot be very amusing," returned Leam with real directness.

"You were dumb too: why did you not talk, if dull, on your fingers?" he asked.

She drew herself up proudly, more like the Leam of Alick than of Edgar. "I do not generally amuse gentlemen," she said.

"Then I am only in the majority?" with that forced smile which was his way when he was most annoyed.

"You have been to-day," answered Leam, quitting his arm as they came up to her sharp-featured chaperon, but looking straight at him as she spoke with those heart-breaking eyes to which, Edgar thought, everything must yield, and he himself at the last.

Not minded, however, to yield at this moment, fighting indeed desperately with himself not to yield at all, Edgar kept away from his sister's step-daughter still more, as if a quarrel had fallen between them; and Adelaide gained in proportion, for suddenly that butterfly, undecided fancy of his seemed to settle on the rector's daughter, to whom he now paid more court than to the whole room beside—court so excessive and so patent that it made the families laugh knowingly, and say among themselves evidently the Hill would soon receive its new mistress, and the rector knew which way things were going when he made that wedding-speech this morning.

Only Adelaide herself was not deceived, but read between the lines and made out the hidden words, which were not flattering to herself. And to her it was manifest that Edgar's attentions, offered with such excited publicity, were not so much to gratify her or to express himself, as to pique Leam Dundas and work off his own unrest.

Meanwhile, Leam, sad and weary, took refuge in the embrasure of a bow-window, where she sat hidden from the room by the heavy curtains which fell before the sidelights, leaving the centre window leading into the garden open and uncurtained. Here she was at rest. She was not obliged to talk. She need not see Edgar always with her enemy, both laughing so merrily—and as it seemed to her so cruelly, so insolently — as they waltzed and danced square dances, looking really as if made one for the other — so handsome as they both were, so well set up, and so thoroughly English.

It made her so unhappy to watch them; for, as she said to herself, Major Harrowby had always been so much her friend, and Adelaide Birkett was so much her enemy, that she felt as if he had deserted her and gone over to the other side. That was all. It was like losing him altogether to see him so much with Adelaide. With any one else she would not have had a pang. He might have danced all the evening, if he had liked, with Susy Fairbairn or Rosy, or any of the strange girls about, but she did not like that he should so entirely abandon her for Adelaide. Wherefore she drew herself away out of sight altogether, and sat behind the curtain looking into the garden and up to the dark, quiet sky.

Presently Alick, who had been searching for her everywhere, spied her out and came up to her. He too was one of those made wretched by the circumstances of the evening. Indeed, he was always wretched, more or less; but he was one of the kind which gets used to its own unhappiness — even reconciled to it if others are happy.

"You are not dancing?" he said to Leam sitting behind the curtain.

"No," said Leam with her old disdain for self-evident propositions. "I am sitting here."

"Don't you care for dancing?" he asked.

He knew that she did, but a certain temperament prefers foolish questions to silence; and Alick Corfield was one who had that temperament.

"Not to-night," she answered, looking into the garden.

"Why not to-night? and when you dance so beautifully too — just as light as a fairy."

"Did you ever see a fairy dance?" was Leam's rejoinder, made quite solemnly.

Alick blushed and shifted his long lean limbs uneasily. He knew that when he said these silly things he should draw down on him Leam's rebuke, but he never could refrain. He seemed impelled somehow to be always foolish and tiresome when with her. "No, I cannot say I have ever seen a fairy," he answered with a nervous little laugh.

"Then how can you say I dance like one?" she asked in perfect good faith of reproach.

"One may imagine," apologized Alick.

"One cannot imagine what does not exist," she answered. "You should not say such foolish things."

"No, you are right, I should not. I do say very foolish things at times. You are right to be angry with me," he said humbly, and writhing.

Leam turned her eyes from him in artistic reprobation of his awkwardness and ungainly homage. She paused a moment: then, as if by an effort, she looked at him straight in the face and kindly. "You are too good to me," she said gently, "and I am too hard on you: it is cruel."

"Don't say that," he cried, in real distress now. "You are perfect in my eyes. Don't scold yourself. I like you to say sharp things to me, and to tell me in your own beautiful way that I am stupid and foolish, if really you trust me and respect me a little under it all. But I should not know you, Leam, if you did not snub me. I should think you were angry with me if you treated me with formal politeness."

He spoke with an honest heart, but an

uncomfortable body; and Leam, turning away her eyes once more, said with a heavy sigh — gravely, sorrowfully, tenderly even, but as if impelled by respect for truth to give her verdict as she thought it—"It is true if it is hard: you are often stupid. You are stupid now, twisting yourself about like that and making silly speeches. But I like you, for all that, and I respect you. I would as soon expect the sun to go out as for you to do wrong. But I wish you would keep still and not talk so much nonsense as you do."

"Thank you!" cried the poor fellow fervently, his bare bone accepted as gratefully as if it had been the sweetest fruit that love could bestow. "You give me all I ask, and more than I deserve, if you say that. And it is so kind of you to care whether I am awkward or not."

"I do not see the kindness," returned Leam gravely.

"Do you see those two spooning?" asked one of the Fairbairn girls, pointing out Leam and Alick to Edgar, the curtain being now held back by Leam to show the world that she was there, not caring to look as if hiding away with Alick.

"They look very comfortable, and the lady picturesque," he answered affectedly, but his brows suddenly contracted and his eyes shot together, as they always did when angry. He had been jealous before now of that shambling, awkward, ill-favored and true-hearted Alick, that loyal knight and faithful watchdog whom he despised with such high-hearted contempt; and he was not pleased to see him paying homage to the young queen whom he himself had deserted.

"Poor Alick Corfield!" said Adelaide pityingly. "He has been a very faithful adorer, I must say. I believe that he has been in love with Leam all his life, while she has held him on and off, and made use of him when she wanted him, and deserted him when she did not want him, with the skill of a veteran."

"Do you think Miss Dundas a flirt?" asked Edgar as affectedly as before.

"Certainly I do, but perhaps not more so than most girls of her kind and age," was the quiet answer with its pretence of fairness.

"Including yourself?"

She smiled with unruffled amiability. "I am an exception," she said. "I am neither of her kind nor, thank Goodness! of her country; and I have never seen the man I cared to flirt with. I am more particular than most people, and more exclusive. Besides," with the most matter-of-fact air in the world, "I am an old maid by nature and destiny. I am preparing for my *métier* too steadily to interrupt it by the vulgar amusement of flirting."

"You an old maid!—you! nonsense!" cried Edgar with an odd expression in his eyes. "You will not be an old maid, Adelaide. I would marry you myself rather."

She chose to take his impertinence simply. "Would you?" she asked. "That would be generous!"

"And unpleasant?" he returned in a lower voice.

"To you? *chi sa?* I should say yes." She spoke quite quietly, as if nothing deeper than the question and answer of the moment lay under this crossing of swords.

"No, not to me," he returned.

"To me, then? I will tell you that when the time comes," she said. "Things are not always what they seem."

"You speak in riddles to-night, fair lady," said Edgar, who honestly did not know what she meant him to infer—whether her present seeming indifference was real, or the deeper feeling which she had so often and for so long allowed him to believe.

"Do I?" She looked into his face serenely, but a little irritatingly. "Then my spoken riddles match your acted ones," she said.

"This is the first time that I have been accused of enigmatic action. Of all men I am the most straightforward, the least dubious."

Edgar said this rather angrily. By that curious law of self-deception which makes cowards boast of their courage and hypocrites of their sincerity, he did really believe himself to be as he said,

notably clear in his will and distinct in his action.

"Indeed! I should scarcely endorse that," answered Adelaide. "I have so often known you enigmatic—a riddle of which, it seems to me, the key is lost, or to which indeed there is no key at all—that I have come to look on you as a puzzle never to be made out."

"You mean a puzzle not known to my fair friend Adelaide, which is not quite the same thing as not known to any one," he said satirically, his ill-humor with himself and everything about him overflowing beyond his power to restrain. His knowledge that Miss Birkett was his proper choice, his mad love for Leam—love only on the right hand, fitness, society, family, every other claim on the left—his jealousy of Alick, all irritated him beyond bearing, and made him forget even his good-breeding in his irritation.

"Not known to my friend Edgar himself," was Adelaide's reply, her color rising, ill-humor being contagious.

"Now, Adelaide, you are getting cross," he said.

"No, I am not in the least cross," she answered with her sweetest smile. "I have a clear conscience—no self-reproaches to make me vexed. It is only those who do wrong that lose their tempers. I know nothing better for good-humor than a good conscience."

"What a pretty little sermon! almost as good as one of the Reverend Alexander's, whose sport, by the way, I shall go and spoil."

"I never knew you cruel before," said Adelaide quietly. "Why should you destroy the poor fellow's happiness, as well as Leam's chances, for a mere passing whim? You surely are not going to repeat with the daughter the father's original mistake with the mother?"

She spoke with the utmost contempt that she could manifest. At all events, if Edgar married Leam Dundas, she would have her soul clear. He should never be able to say that he had gone over the edge of the precipice unwarned. She at least would be faithful, and would show him how unworthy his choice was.

"Well, I don't know," he drawled. "Do you think she would have me if I asked her?"

"Edgar!" cried Adelaide reproachfully. "You are untrue to yourself when you speak in that manner to me—I, who am your best friend. You have no one who cares so truly, so unselfishly, for your happiness and honor as I do."

She began with reproach, but she ended with tenderness; and Edgar, who was wax in the hands of a pretty woman, was touched. "Good, dear Adelaide!" he said with fervor and quite naturally, "you are one of the best girls in the world. But I *must* go and speak to Miss Dundas, I have neglected her so abominably all the evening."

On which, as if to prevent any reply, he turned away, and the next moment was standing by Leam sitting in the window-seat half concealed by the curtain, Alick paying awkward homage as his manner was.

Leam gave the faintest little start, that was more a shiver than a start, as he came up. She turned her tragic eyes to him with dumb reproach; but if she was sorrowful she was not craven, and though she meant him to see that she disapproved of his neglect—which had indeed been too evident to be ignored—she did not want him to think that she was unhappy because of it.

"Are you not dancing, Miss Dundas?" asked Edgar as gravely as if he was putting a *bonâ fide* question.

"No," said Leam—thinking to herself, "Even he can ask silly questions."

"Why not? Are you tired?"

"Yes," answered laconic Leam with a little sigh.

"I am afraid you are bored, and that you do not like balls," he said with false sympathy, but real love, sorry to see the weariness of face and spirit which he had not been sorry to cause.

"I am bored, and I do not like balls," she answered, her directness in nowise softened out of regard for Edgar as the giver of the feast or for Alick as her companion.

"Yet you like dancing; so come and

shake off your boredom with me," said Edgar with a sudden flush. "They are just beginning to waltz: let me have one turn with you."

"No. Why do you ask me? You do not like to dance with me," said Leam proudly.

"No? Who told you such nonsense —such a falsehood as that?" hotly.

"Yourself," she answered.

Alick shifted his place uneasily. Something in Leam's manner to Edgar struck him with an acute sense of distress, and seemed to tell him all that he had hitherto failed to understand. But he felt indignant with Edgar, even though his neglect, at which Leam had been so evidently pained, might to another man have given hopes. He would rather have known her loving, beloved, hence blessed, than wounded by this man's coldness, by his indifference to what was to him, poor faithful and idealizing Alick, such surpassing and supreme delightfulness.

"I?" cried Edgar, willfully misunderstanding her. "When did I tell you I did not like to dance with you?"

"This evening," said Leam, not looking into his face.

"Oh, there is some mistake here. Come with me now. I will soon convince you that I do not dislike to dance with you," cried Edgar, excited, peremptory, eager.

Her accusation had touched him. It made him resolute to show her that he did not dislike to dance with her — she, the most beautiful girl in the room, the best dancer—she, Leam, that name which meant a love-poem in itself to him.

"Come," he said again, offering his hand, not his arm.

Leam looked at him, meaning to refuse. What did she see in his face that changed hers so wholly? The weariness swept off like clouds from the sky; her mournful eyes brightened into joy; the pretty little smile, which Edgar knew so well, stole round her mouth, timid, fluttering, evanescent; and she laid her hand in his with an indescribable expression of relief, like one suddenly free from pain.

"I am glad you do not dislike to dance with me," she said with a happy sigh; and the next moment his arm was round her waist and her light form borne along into the dance.

As they went off Alick passed through the open window and stole away into the garden. The pain lost by Leam had been found by him, and it lay heavy on his soul.

Dancing was Leam's greatest pleasure and her best accomplishment. She had inherited the national passion as well as the grace bequeathed by her mother; and even Adelaide was forced to acknowledge that no one in or about North Aston came near to her in this. Edgar, too, danced in the best style of the best kind of English gentleman; and it was really something for the rest to look at when these two "took the floor." But never had Leam felt during a dance as she felt now — never had she shone to such perfection. She was as if taken up into another world, where she was some one else and not herself—some one radiant, without care, light-hearted, and without memories. The rapid movement intoxicated her; the lights no longer dazzled but excited her; she was not oppressed by the many eyes that looked at her: she was elated, made proud and glad, for was she not dancing as none of them could, and with Edgar? Edgar, too, was not the Edgar of the dull, prosaic every day, but was changed like all the rest. He was like some prince of old-time romance, some knight of chivalry, some hero of history, and the poetry, the passion, that seemed to inspire her with more than ordinary life were reflected in him.

"My darling!" Edgar said below his breath, pressing her to him warmly, "do you think now that it is no pleasure for me to dance with you?"

Leam, startled at the word, the tone, looked up half scared into his face: then —she herself scarcely knowing what she did, but instinctively answering what she saw—Edgar felt her little hand on his shoulder lie there heavily, her figure yield to his arm as it had never yielded before, while her head drooped like a

flower faint with the heavy sunlight till it nearly touched his breast.

"My Leam!" he whispered again, "I love you! I love you! my Leam, my love!"

Leam sighed dreamily. "This is like death—and heaven," she murmured as he stopped by the window where she had sat with Alick, and carried her half fainting into the garden.

The cool night-air revived her, and she opened her eyes, wondering where she was and what had happened. Even now she could not take it all in, but she knew that something had come to her of which she was ashamed, and that she must not stay here alone with Major Harrowby. With an attempt at her old pride she tried to draw herself away, not looking at him, feeling abashed and humbled. "I will dance no more," she said faltering.

Edgar, who had her hands clasped in his, drew her gently to him again. He held her hands up to his breast, both enclosed in one of his, his other arm round her waist. "Will you leave me, my Leam?" he said in his sweetest tones. "Do you not love me well enough to stay with me?"

"I must go in," said Leam faintly.

"Before you have said that you love me? Will you not say so, Leam? I love you, my darling: no man ever loved as I love you, my sweetest Leam, my angel, my delight! Tell me that you love me—tell me, darling."

"Is this love?" said Leam turning away her head, her whole being penetrated with a kind of blissful agony, where she did not know which was strongest, the pleasure or the pain: perhaps it was the pain.

"Kiss me, and then I shall know," whispered Edgar.

"No," said Leam trembling and hiding her face, "I must not do that."

"Ah, you do not love me, and we shall never meet again," he cried in the disappointed lover's well-feigned tone of despair, dropping her hands and half turning away.

Leam stood for a moment as if she hesitated: then, with an indescribable air of self-surrender, she went closer to him and laid her hands very gently on his shoulders. "I will kiss you rather than make you unhappy," she said in a soft voice, lifting up her face.

"My angel! now I know that you love me!" cried Edgar triumphantly, holding her strained to his heart as he pressed her bashful, tremulous little lips, Leam feeling that she had proved her love by the sacrifice of all that she held most dear—by the sacrifice of herself and modesty.

The first kiss for a girl whose love was as strong as fire and as pure—for a girl who had not a weak or sensual fibre in her nature—yes, it was a sacrifice the like of which men do not understand; especially Edgar, loose-lipped, amorous Edgar, with his easy loves, his wide experience, his consequent loss of sensitive perception, and his holding all women as pretty much alike—creatures rather than individuals, and created for man's pleasure: especially he did not understand how much this little action, which was one so entirely of course to him, cost her—how great the gift, how eloquent of what it included. But Leam, burning with shame, thought that she should never bear to see the sun again; and yet it was for Edgar, and for Edgar she would have done even more than this.

"Have you enjoyed yourself, Leam, my dear?" asked Mrs. Corfield as they drove home in the quiet moonlight.

"No—yes," answered Leam, who wished that the little woman would not talk to her. How could she say that this fiery unrest was enjoyment? The word was so trivial. But indeed what word could compass the strange passion that possessed her?—that mingled bliss and anguish of young love newly born, lately confessed.

"Have you enjoyed yourself, Alick, my boy?" asked the little woman again.

She had had no love-affairs to disturb her with pleasure or with pain, and she was full of the mechanism of the evening, and wanted to talk it over.

"I never enjoy that kind of thing," answered Alick in a voice that was full of tears.

He had witnessed the scene in the garden, and his heart was sore, both for himself and for her.

"Oh," said Mrs. Corfield briskly, "it was a pretty sight, and I am sure every one was happy."

Had she seen Adelaide Birkett sitting before her glass, her face covered in her hands and shedding hot tears like rain —had she seen Leam standing by her open window, letting the cool night-air blow upon her, too feverish and disturbed to rest—she would not have said that every one had been happy at the ball given in honor of Josephine's marriage. Perhaps of all those immediately concerned Edgar was the most content, for now that he had committed himself he had done with the torment of indecision, and by putting himself finally under the control of circumstances he seemed to have thrown off the strain of responsibility.

So the night passed, and the next day came, bringing toil to the weary, joy to the happy, wealth to the rich, and sorrow to the sad—bringing Edgar to Leam, and Leam to the deeper consciousness and confession of her love.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DUNASTON CASTLE.

It was not a bad idea to continue the wedding-gayeties of yesterday evening by a picnic to-day. People are always more or less out of sorts after a ball, and a day spent in the open air soothes the feverish and braces up the limp. Wherefore the rectory gave a picnic to blow away the lingering vapors of last evening at the Hill, and the place of meeting chosen was Dunaston Castle.

Leam had of course been invited with the rest. Had she been a different person, and more in accord with the general sentiments of the neighborhood than she was, she would have been made the "first young lady" for the moment, because of her connection with the bridegroom; but being what she was—Leam —she was merely included with the rest, and by Adelaide with reluctance.

The day wore on bright and clear. Already it was past two o'clock, but Leam, irresolute what to do, sat in the garden under the shadow of the cut-leaved hornbeam, from the branches of which Pepita used to swing in her hammock, smoking cigarettes and striking her zambomba. One part of her longed to go, the other held her back. The one was the strength of love, the other its humiliation. How could she meet Major Harrowby again? she thought. She had kissed him of her own free will last night—she, Leam, had kissed him; she had leant against his breast, he with his arms round her; she had said the sacred and irrevocable words, "I love you." How could she meet him again without sinking to the earth for shame? What a strange kind of shame! —not sin and yet not innocence; something to blush for, but not to repent of; something not to be repeated, but not to wish undone. And what a perplexed state of feeling!—longing, fearing to see Edgar again—praying of each moment as it came that he should not appear; grieved each moment as it passed that he was still absent.

So she sat in all the turmoil of her new birth, distracted between love and shame, and not knowing which was stronger—feeling as if in a dream, but every now and then waking to think of Dunaston, and should she go or stay away—when, just as little Fina came running to her, ready dressed and loud in her insistence that they should set off at once, the lodge-gates swung back and Edgar Harrowby rode up to the door. When she saw him dismount and walk across the lawn to where she sat—though it was what she had been waiting for all the day, hoping if fearing—yet now that it had come and he was really there, she wished that the earth would open at her feet, or that she could flee away and hide herself like a scared hind in her cover. But she could not have risen had there been even any place of refuge for her. Breathing with difficulty, and seeing nothing that was before her, she was chained to her seat by a feeling that was half terror, half joy—a feeling utterly inexplic-

able in its total destruction of her self-possession to reticent Leam, who hitherto had held herself in such proud restraint, and had kept her soul from all influence from the world without. And now the citadel was stormed and she was conquered and captive.

Meanwhile, the handsome officer walked over the sunny lawn with his military step, well set up, lordly, smiling. He liked to see this bashfulness in Leam. It was the sign of submission in one so unsubdued that flattered his pride as men like it to be flattered. Now indeed he was the man and the superior, and this trembling little girl, blushing and downcast, was no longer his virgin nymph, self-contained and unconfessed, but the slave of his love, like so many others before her.

The child ran up to him joyfully. She and Edgar were "great friends," as he used to say. He lifted her in his arms, placed her on his shoulder like a big blue forget-me-not gathered from the grass, then deposited her by Leam on the seat beneath the cut-leaved hornbeam. And Leam was grateful that the little one was there. It was somehow a protection against herself.

"I came to take you to the castle," said Edgar, looking down on the drooping figure with a tender smile on his handsome face as he took her hand in his and held it. "Are you ready?"

Leam's lips moved, but at the first inaudibly. "No," she then said with an effort.

"It is time," said Edgar, still holding her hand.

"I do not think I shall go," she faltered, not raising her eyes from the ground.

Edgar, towering above her, always smiling—the child playing with his beard as she stood on the seat breast-high with himself—still holding that small burning hand in his, Leam not resisting, then said in Spanish, "My soul! have pity on me."

The old familiar words thrilled the girl like a voice from the dead. Had anything been wanting to rivet the chains in which love had bound her, it was these words, "My soul," spoken by her lover in her mother's tongue. She answered more freely, almost eagerly, in the same language, "Would you be sorry?" and Edgar, whose Castilian was by no means unlimited, replied in English "Yes" at a venture, and sat down on the seat by her.

"Fina, go and ask Jones to tell you pretty stories about the bay," he then said to the child.

"And may I ride him?" cried Fina, sure to take the ell when given the inch.

"Ask Jones," he answered good-naturedly: "I dare say he will put you up."

Whereupon Fina ran off to the groom, whom she teased for the next half hour to give her a ride on the bay.

But Jones was obdurate. The major's horse was not only three sticks and a barrel, like some on 'em, he said, and too full of his beans for a little miss like her to mount. The controversy, however, kept the child engaged if it made her angry; and thus Edgar was left free to break down more of that trembling defence-work within which Leam was doing her best to entrench herself.

"Do you know, Leam, you have not looked at me once since I came?" he said, after they had been sitting for some time, he talking on indifferent subjects to give her time to recover herself, and she replying in monosyllables, or perhaps not replying at all.

She was silent, but her eyes drooped a little lower.

"Will you not look at me, darling?" he asked in that mellifluous voice of his which no woman had yet been found strong enough to withstand.

"Why?" said Leam, vainly trying after her old self, and doing her best to speak as if the subject was indifferent to her, but failing, as how should she not? The loud beatings of her heart rang in her ears, her lips quivered so that she could not steady them, and her eyes were so full of shame, their lids so weighted with consciousness, that truly she could not have raised them had she tried.

"Why? Look at me and I will tell you," was his smiling answer.

She turned to him, and, as once before, bound by the spell of loving obedi-

ence, lifted her heavy lids and raised her dewy eyes slowly till they came to the level of his. Then they met his, and Edgar laughed—a happy and abounding laugh which somehow Leam did not resent, though in general a laugh the cause of which she did not fully understand was an offence to her or a stupidity.

"Now I am satisfied," he said in his sweetest voice. "Now I know that the morning has not destroyed the dream of the night, and that you love me. Tell it me once more, Leam, sweet Leam! I must hear it in the open sunshine as I heard it in the starlight: tell me again that you love me."

Leam bent her pretty head to hide her crimson cheeks. How hard this confession was to her, and yet how sweet! How difficult to make, and yet how sorry she would be if anything came between them so that it was left unmade!

"Tell me, my Leam, my darling!" said Edgar again, with that delicious tyranny of love, that masterful insistence of manly tenderness, which women prize and obey.

"I love you," half whispered Leam, feeling as if she had again forfeited her pride and modesty, and for the second time had committed that strange sweet sin against herself for which she blushed and of which she did not repent.

"And I love you," he answered—"fervently, madly if you like. I never knew what love was before I knew you, my darling. When you are all my own I will make you confess that the love of an English gentleman is worth living for."

"*You* are worth living for," said Leam with timid fervor, defending him against all possible rivalry of circumstance or person. "I do not care about your English gentlemen. It is only you."

"That brute of a Jones!" muttered Edgar as he put his arm round her waist and glanced toward the door.

"No," said Leam gravely, shrinking back, "you must not do that."

"What a shy wild bird it is!" he said lovingly, though he was disappointed. And he did not like this kind of disappointment. "Will you never be tamed, my Leam?"

"Not to that," said innocent Leam in the same grave way; and Edgar smiled behind his golden beard, but not so that she could see the smile.

"Ah, but you must obey me now—do as I tell you in everything," he said with perfect seriousness of mien and accent. "You have given yourself to me now, and if I ask you to kiss me you must, just as readily as Fina, and let me caress and pet you as much as I like."

"Must I? but I do not like it," said Leam simply.

He laughed outright, and—Jones not looking—took her hand and carried it to his lips. "Is this unpleasant?" he asked, looking up from under his eyebrows.

Leam blushed, hesitated, trembled. "No," she then said in a low voice, "not from you."

On which he kissed it again, and Leam had no wish to retract her confession.

"Now go and make ready to come to the castle," he said after a moment's pause. "I told you before that you must obey me, now that you have promised to be my wife. Command is the husband's privilege, Leam, and obedience the wife's happiness: don't you know? So come, darling! They were all to assemble at two," looking at his watch, "and here we are close on three! You do not wish not to go now, my pet?"

"No," said Leam, with her happy little fleeting smile: "I am glad to go. I shall be with you, and you wish it."

"What an exquisite little creature! In a week she will come to my hand like a tame bird," was Edgar's thought as he watched her slender, graceful figure slowly crossing the lawn with that undulating step of her mother's nation. "In a week's time I shall have tamed her," he repeated with a difference; and he felt glad that he had bespoken Leam Dundas betimes, and that fate and fortune had made him her prospective proprietor. "She will make me happy," he said as his last thought: he forgot to add either assurance or hope that he should make her the same. That is not generally part of a man's matrimonial calculations.

The confidence of love soon grows. When Leam came back to the seat

under the cut-leaved hornbeam, where Edgar still waited for her to have the pleasure of watching her approach, she was not so much ashamed and oppressed as when he had first found her there. She did not want to run away, and she was losing her fear of wrongdoing. She was beginning instead to feel that delightful sense of dependence on a strong man's love which—*pace* the third sex born in these odd latter times—is the most exquisite sensation that a woman can know. She was no longer alone—no longer an alien imprisoned in family bonds, but, though one of a family, always an alien and imprisoned, never homed and united. Now she was Edgar's as she had been mamma's; and there was dawning on her the consciousness of the same oneness, the same intimate union of heart and life and love, as she had had with mamma. She belonged to him. He loved her, and she—yes, she knew now that she had always loved him, had always lived for him. He was the secret god whom she had carried about with her in her soul from the beginning—the predestined of her life, now for the first time recognized—the only man whom she could have ever loved. To her intense and single-hearted nature change or infidelity was an unimaginable crime, something impossible to conceive. Had she not met Edgar she would never have loved any one, she thought: having met him, it was impossible that she should not have loved him, the ideal to her as he was of all manly nobleness and grace, given to her to love by a Power higher than that of chance.

She was dimly conscious of this deep sense of rest in her new-found joy as she came across the lawn in her pretty summer dress of pearly gray touched here and there with crimson—the loveliest creature to be seen for miles around. Her usually mournful face was brightened with an inner kind of bliss which, from the face of the Tragic Muse, made it the face of a youthful seraph serene and blessed; her smile was one of almost unearthly ecstasy, if it still retained that timid, tremulous, fleeting expression which was so beautiful to Edgar; her eyes, no longer sad and sorrowful, but dewy, tender, bashful, shone with the purity, the confidence, the self-abandonment of a young girl's first and happy love: every gesture, every line, seemed to have gained a greater grace and richness since yesterday; and as she came up to her lover, and laid her hand in his when he rose to meet her and looked for one shy instant into his eyes, then dropped her own in shame-faced tremor at what they had seen and told, he said again to himself that he had done well. If even she should call the hounds at a hunt-dinner *dogs*, and say that hunting was stupid and cruel, what might not be forgiven to such beauty, such love as hers?

Yes, he was satisfied with himself and with her; and with himself because of her. He had done well, and she was eminently the right kind of wife for him, let conventional cavilers say what they would. He never felt more reconciled to fortune and himself than he did to-day when he rode by the side of the carriage wherein Leam and Fina sat, and looked through the coming years to the time when he should have a little Fina of his own with her mother Leam's dark eyes and her mother Leam's devoted heart.

The day was perfect, so was the place. Both were all that the day and place of young love should be. The view from the castle heights, with the river below, the woods around and the moor beyond, was always beautiful, but to-day, in the full flush of the early summer, it was at its best. The golden sunshine, alternating with purple shadows, was lying in broad tracts on meadow and moor, and lighting up the forest trees so that the delicate tints and foliage of bough and branch came out in photographic clearness; the river, where it caught the sun like a belt of silver, where it was under the shadow like a band of lapis-lazuli, ran like a vein of life through the scene, and its music could be heard here where they stood; close at hand the old gray ivy-covered ruins, with their stories and memories of bygone times, seemed

to add to the vivid fervor of the moment by the force of contrast—that past so drear and old, the present so full of passionate hope and love; while the shadows of things that had once been real trooped among the ruins and flitted in and out the desert places, chased by laughing girls and merry children, as life chases death, youth drives out age, and the summer rises from the grave of winter. It was a day, a scene, to remember for life, even by those to whom it brought nothing special: how much more, then, by those to whom it symbolized the fresh fruition of the summer of the heart, the glad glory of newly-confessed love!

This was Leam's day. Edgar devoted himself publicly to her—so publicly that people gathered into shady corners to discuss what it meant, and to ask each other if the tie already binding the two families was to be supplemented and strengthened by another? It looked like it, they said, in whispers, for it was to be supposed that Major Harrowby was an honorable man and a gentleman, and would not play with a child like Leam.

Dear Mrs. Birkett was manifestly distressed at what she saw. Though Adelaide made her mother no more a confidante than if she had been a stranger, yet she knew well enough where her daughter's wishes pointed; and they pointed to where her own were set. She too thought that Edgar and Adelaide were made for each other, and that Adelaide at the Hill would be eminently matter in the right place. She would not have grudged Leam the duke's son, could she have secured him, but she did grudge her Edgar Harrowby. It would be such a nice match for Addy, who was getting on now, and whose temper at home was trying; and she had hoped fervently that this year would see the matter settled. It was hanging fire a little longer than she quite liked: still, she always hoped and believed until today, when Edgar appropriated Leam in this strange manner before them all, seeming to present her to them as his own, so that they should make no further mistake.

But if Mrs. Birkett looked distressed, Adelaide, who naturally suffered more than did her mother, kept her own counsel so bravely that no one could have told how hard she had been hit. If she betrayed herself in any way, it was in being rather more attentive and demonstrative to her guests than was usual with her; but she behaved with the Spartan pride of the English gentlewoman, and deceived all who were present but herself.

Even Edgar took her by outside seeming, and put his belief in her love for him as a fallacy behind him. And it said something for a certain goodness of heart, with all his faults and vanity, that he was more relieved than mortified to think that he had been mistaken. Yet he liked to be loved by women, and the character which he had chiefly affected on the social side of him was that of the Irresistible. Nevertheless, he was glad that he had been mistaken in Adelaide's feelings, and relieved to think that she would not be unhappy because he had chosen Leam and not herself.

Yes, this was Leam's day, her one spell of perfect happiness — the day whereon there was no past and no future, only the glad sufficiency of the present—a day which seemed as if it had been lent by Heaven, so great was its exquisite delight, so pure its cloudless, shadowless sunshine of love.

Leam neither knew nor noted how the neighbors looked. They had somehow gone far off from her: when they spoke she answered them mechanically, and if she passed them she took no more heed than if they had been so many sheep or dogs lying about the grass. She only knew that she was with Edgar—that she loved him and that he loved her. It was a knowledge that made her strong to resist the whole world had the whole world opposed her, and that dwarfed the families into insignificant, almost impersonal, adjuncts of the place, of no more consequence than the ferns growing about the fallen stones. Not even Adelaide could jar that rich melodious chord to which her whole being vibrated. It was all peace, contentment, love; and for

the first and only time in her life Leam Dundas was absolutely happy.

The two lovers, always together and apart from the rest, wandered about the ruins till evening and the time for dispersion and reassembling at the rectory came. The sunset had been in accord with the day, golden and glorious, but after the last rays had gone heavy masses of purple clouds that boded ill for the morrow gathered with strange suddenness on the horizon. Still the lovers lingered about the ruins. The families had left them alone for the latter part of the time, and they discussed now Leam's forwardness as they had discussed before Edgar's intentions. But neither Edgar nor Leam took heed. They were in love, and the world beyond themselves was simply a world of shadows with which they had no concern.

It had been such a day of happiness to both that they were loath to end it, so they lingered behind the rest, and tried, as lovers do, to stop time by love. They were sitting now on one of the fallen blocks of stone of the many scattered about, he talking to her in a low voice, "I love you, I love you," the burden of his theme; she for the most part listening to words which made the sweetest music discord, but sometimes responding as a tender fainter echo. He did not see the eyes that were watching him from behind the broken wall, nor the jealous ears that were drinking in their own pain so greedily. He saw only Leam, and was conscious only that he loved her and she him.

Presently he said, tempting her with the lover's affectation of distrust, "I do not think you love me really, my Leam," bending over her as if he would have folded her to his heart. Had she been any but Leam he would. But the love-ways that came so easy to him were lessons all unlearnt as yet by her, and he respected both her reticence and her reluctance.

"Not love you!" she said with soft surprise—"I not love you!"

"Do you?" he asked.

She was silent for a moment. "I do love you," she said in her quiet, intense way. "I do not talk—you know that—but if I could make you happy by dying for you I would. I love you—oh, I cannot say how much! I seem to love God and all the saints, the sun and the flowers, Spain, our Holy Mother and mamma in you. You are life to me. I seem to have loved you all my life under another name. When you are with me I have no more pain or fear left. You are myself—more than myself to me."

"My darling! and you to me!" cried Edgar.

But his voice, though sweet and tender, had not the passionate ring of hers, and his face, though full of the man's bolder love, had not the intensity which made her so beautiful, so sublime. It was all the difference between the experience which knew the whole thing by heart, and which cared for itself more than for the beloved, and the wholeness, the ecstasy, of the first and only love born of a nature single, simple and concentrated.

Adelaide, watching and listening behind the broken wall, saw and heard it all. Her head was on fire, her heart had sunk like lead; she could not stay any longer assisting thus at the ruin of her life's great hope; she had already stayed too long. As she stole noiselessly away, her white dress passing a distant opening looked ghastly, seen through the rising mist which the young moon faintly silvered.

"What is that?" cried Leam, a look of terror on her pale face as she rapidly crossed herself. "It is the Evil Sign."

"No," laughed Edgar, profiting by the moment to take her in his arms, judging that if she was frightened she would be willing to feel sheltered. "It is only one of the ladies passing to go down. Perhaps it is Adelaide Birkett: I think it was."

"And that would be an evil sign in itself," said Leam, still shuddering. And yet how safe she felt with his arms about her like this!

"Poor dear Addy! why should she be an ill omen to you, you dear little fluttering, frightened dove?"

"She hates me—always has, so long

as I can remember her," answered Leam. "And you are her friend," she added.

"Her friend, yes, but not her lover, as I am yours—not her future husband," said Edgar.

Leam's hand touched his softly, with a touch that was as fleeting and subtle as her smile.

"A friend is not a wife, you know," he continued. "And you are to be my wife, my own dear and beloved little wife—always with me, never parted again."

"Never parted again! Ah, I shall never be unhappy then," she murmured.

A flash of summer lightning broke through the pale faint moonlight and lighted up the old gray towers with a lurid glow.

Leam was not usually frightened at lightning, but now, perhaps because her whole being was overwrought and strung, she started and crouched down with a sense of awe strangely unlike her usual self.

"Come, we are going to have a storm," said Edgar, whom every manifestation of weakness claiming his superior protection infinitely pleased and seemed to endear her yet more to him. "We must be going, my darling, else I shall have you caught in the rain. We shall just have time to get to the rectory before it comes on, and they are waiting for us."

"I would rather not go to the rectory to-night," said Leam with a sudden return to her old shy self.

"No? Why, my sweet?" he said lovingly. "How can I live through the evening without you?"

"Can you not? Do you really wish me to go?" she answered seriously.

"Of course I wish it: how should I not? But tell me why you raise an objection. Why would you rather not go?"

"I would rather be alone and think of you than only see you at the rectory with all those people," she answered simply.

"But we have had all the people about here, and yet we have been pretty much alone," he said.

"We could not be together at the rectory, and"—she blushed, but her eyes were full of more than love as she raised them to his face—"I could not bear that any one should come between us to-day. Better be alone at home, where I can think of you with no one to interrupt me."

"It is a disappointment, but who could refuse such a plea and made in such a voice?" said Edgar, who felt that perhaps she was right in her instinct, and who at all events knew that he should be spared something that would be a slight effort in Adelaide's own house. "I shall spoil you, I know, but I cannot refuse you anything when you look like that. Very well: you shall go home if you wish it, my beloved, and I will make your excuses."

"Thank you," said Leam, with the sweetest little air of humbleness and patience.

"How could that fool Sebastian Dundas say she was difficult to manage? and how can Adelaide see in her the possibility of anything like wickedness? She is the most loving and tractable little angel in the world. She will give me no kind of trouble, and I shall be able to mould her from the first and do what I like with her."

These were Edgar's thoughts as he took Leam's hand on his arm, holding it there tenderly pressed beneath his other hand, while he said aloud, "My darling! my delight! if I had had to create my ideal I should have made *you*. You are everything I most love;" and again he said, as so often before, "the only woman I have ever loved or ever could love."

And Leam believed him.

Adelaide accepted Major Harrowby's excuses for Miss Dundas's sudden headache and fatigue gallantly, as she had accepted her position through the day: she showed nothing, expressed nothing, but bore herself with consummate ease and self-possession. She won Edgar's admiration for her tact and discretion, for the beautiful results of good-breeding. He congratulated himself on having such a friend as Adelaide Birkett. She would be of infinite advantage to Leam when his wife, and when he had persuaded that sweet doubter to believe

in her and accept her as she was, and as he wished her to be accepted. As it was in the calendar of his wishes at this moment that Adelaide had never loved him, never wished to marry him, he dismissed the belief which he had cherished so long as if it had never been, and decided that it had been a mistake throughout. She was just his friend—no more, and never had been more. He was not singular in his determination to find events as his desires ruled them. It is a pleasant way of shuffling off self-reproach and of excusing one's own fickleness.

Edgar just now believed as he wished to believe, and shut out all the rest. As he lit his last cigar, sitting on the terrace at the Hill and watching the sheet-lightning on the horizon, he thought with satisfaction on the success of his life. Specially he congratulated himself on his final choice. Leam would make the sweetest little wife in the world, and he loved her passionately. But "spooning" was exhausting work: he would cut it short and marry her as soon as he could get things together. Then his thoughts wandered away to some other of his personal matters; and while Leam was living over the day hour by hour, word by word, he had settled the terms for Farmer Mason's new lease, had decided to rebuild the north lodge, which was ugly and incommodious; and on this, something catching the end of that inexplicable association of ideas, he wondered how some one whom he had left in India was going on, and what had become of Violet Cray.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN LETTERS OF FIRE.

THE storm which had threatened to break last night still held off, but the spirit of the weather had changed. It was no longer bright and clear, but sunless, airless, heated, silent—the stillness which seems to presage as much sorrow to man as it heralds tumult to Nature. Leam, however—interpenetrated by her love, which gave what it felt and saw what it brought—always remembered this early day as the ideal of peace and softness, where was no prophecy of coming evil, no shadow of the avenging hand stretched out to punish and destroy—only peace and softness, love, joy and rest.

The gray background of the heavy sky, which to others was heavy and gloomy, was to her the loveliest expression of repose, and the absence of sunlight was as grateful as a veil drawn against the glare. If not beautiful in itself, it added beauty to other things: witness the passionate splendor given by it to the flowers, which seemed by contrast to gain a force and vitality of color, a richness and significance, they never had before. She specially remembered in days to come a bed of scarlet poppies that glowed like so many cups of flame against the dark masses of evergreens behind them; and the scarlet geraniums, the bold bosses of the blood-red peonies, the fiery spathes of salvia and gladiolus, the low-lying verbenas like rubies cast on the green leaves and brown earth, the red gold, flame-color streaked with lines of blood, of the nasturtiums festooning the bordering wires of the centre beds, all seemed to come out like spires of flame or rosettes dyed in blood, till the garden was filled with only those two colors—the one of fire and the other of blood.

But though Leam remembered this in after-days as the weird prophecy of what was to come, at the time those burning beds of flowers simply pleased her with their brilliant coloring; and she sat in her accustomed place on the garden-chair, under the cut-leaved hornbeam, and looked at the garden stretching before her with the fresh, surprised kind of admiration of one who had never seen it before—as if it told her something different to-day from what it had in times past; as indeed it did.

Presently Edgar came down from the Hill. He had not told his people yet of the double bond which he designed to make between the two houses. He thought it was only fitting to wait until Sebastian had returned and he had

gained the paternal consent in the orthodox way. And the false air of secrecy which this temporary reticence gave his engagement gave it also a false air of romance which exactly suited his temperament in the matter of love. Perhaps for the woman destined to be his wife he would have preferred to dispense with this characteristic of his dealings with those other women, her predecessors, not destined to be his wives. All the same, it was delightful, as things were, to come down to Ford House on this sultry day and sit under the shadow of the hornbeam, with Leam looking her loveliest by his side, and butterfly-like Fina running in and out in the joyous way of a lively child fond of movement and not afflicted with shyness; delightful to feel that he was enacting a little poem unknown to all the world beside—that he was the magician who had first wakened this young soul into life and taught it the sweet suffering of love; and delightful to know that he was king and supreme, the only man concerned, with not even a father to share, just yet, his domain.

Edgar, at all times charming, because at all times good-humored and not inconveniently in earnest, when specially pleased with himself was one of the most delightful companions to be found. He had seen much, and he talked pleasantly on what he had seen, whipping up the surface of things dexterously and not forcing his hearers to digest the substance. Hence he was never a bore, nor did he disturb the placid shallows of ignorance by an unwelcome influx of information. He had just so much of the histrionic element, born of vanity and self-consciousness, as is compatible with the impassive quietude prescribed by good-breeding, whereby his manner had a color that was an excellent substitute for sincerity, and his speech a pictorial glow that did duty for enthusiasm when he thought fit to simulate enthusiasm. He had, too, that sensitive tact which seems to feel weak places as if by instinct; and when he was at his best his good-nature led him to avoid giving pain and to affect a sympathetic air, which was no more true than his earnestness. But it took with the uncritical and the affectionate, and Major Harrowby was quoted by many as an eminently kind and tender-hearted man.

To women he had that manner of subtle deference and flattering admiration characteristic of men who make love to all women—even to children in the bud and to matrons more than full-blown—and who are consequently idolized by the sex all round. And when this natural adorer of many laid himself out to make special love to one he was, as we know, irresistible. He was irresistible to-day. He was really in love with Leam; and if his love had not the intensity, the tenacity of hers, yet it was true of its kind, and for him very true.

But he was not so much in love as to be unconscious of the most graceful way of making it; consequently, he knew exactly what he was doing and how he looked and what he said, while Leam, sitting there by his side, drinking in his words as if they were heavenly utterances, forgot all about herself, and lived only in her speechless, her unfathomable adoration of the man she loved. Her life at this moment was one pulse of voiceless happiness: it was one strain of sensation, emotion, passion, love; but it was not conscious thought nor yet perception of outward things by her senses.

If yesterday at Dunaston had been a day of blessedness, this was its twin sister, and the better favored of the two. There was a certain flavor of domesticity in these quiet hours passed together in the garden, interrupted only by the child as she ran hither and thither breaking in on them, sometimes not unpleasantly when speech was growing embarrassed because emotion was growing too strong, that seemed to Leam the sweetest experience which life could give her were she to live for ever; and the sunless stillness of the day suited her nature even better than the gayer glory of yesterday. To-day, too, it was still more peace in her inner being and still less unrest. The more accustomed she was becoming to the strange fact of loving and being loved by a man not a

Spaniard, and one whom mamma would neither have chosen nor approved of, the more she was at ease both in heart and manner, and the more exquisite and profound her blessedness. And who does not know what happiness can do for a girl of strong emotions, naturally reserved, by circumstances friendless, by habit joyless, and how the soul of such a one seems to throw off its husk like the enchanted victim of a fairy-tale when the true being that has been hidden is released by love? It is a transformation as entire as any wrought by magic word or wand; and it was the transformation wrought with Leam to-day. She was Leam Dundas truly in all the essential qualities of identity, but Leam Dundas with another soul, an added faculty, an awakened consciousness—Leam set free from the darkness of the bondage in which she had hitherto lived.

"You look like another being: you have looked like this ever since you told me you loved me," said Edgar, drawing himself a little back and gazing at her with the critical tenderness of a man's pride and love. "You are like Psyche wakened out of her sleep, and for the first time using your wings and living in the upper air."

The metaphor was a little confused, but that did not signify. The whole image was essentially Greek to Leam, and she only knew that it sounded well and did somehow apply to her—that she had just awakened out of sleep, and was for the first time using her wings and living in the upper air.

"I have not really lived till now," she answered. "And now things seem different."

"In what way?" asked Edgar, smiling.

He knew what she meant, but he wanted to hear her reveal herself.

She smiled too. "More beautiful," she said, a little vaguely.

"As what? I like to be precise, and I want to know exactly what my darling thinks and means."

He said this with his most bewitching smile and in his tenderest voice. It was so pleasant to him to receive these first shy, confused confessions.

"The flowers and the sky," said Leam, raising her eyes and looking through the garden and on to the gray and narrowed horizon. "I remember when flowers were weeds and one day was like another. I did not know if the sun shone or not. But this year seems now to have been always summer and sunshine. The very weeds are more lovely than the flowers used to be."

"Flowers and sunshine since you knew me, my darling?"

"Yes," she answered shyly.

Edgar glanced at the heavy clouds hanging over head, but he did not say that he found this gray day singularly gloomy and oppressive, and that even love could not set a fairy sun in the sky. He took up the second clause of her loving speech: "And I am your flower? What a precious little compliment! I hope I shall be your amaranth, my Leam—your everlasting flower—if a rough soldier may have such a pretty comparison made in his favor. Do you think I shall be everlasting to you?"

"When God dies my love will die, and not before," said Leam, with her grave fervor, her voice of concentrated passion.

Her voice and manner thrilled Edgar. Her words, too, in their very boldness were more exciting than the most refined commonplaces of other women. It was this union of more than ordinary womanly reticence with almost savage passion and directness that had always been Leam's charm to Edgar; nevertheless, he hesitated for a few minutes, thinking whether he should correct her manner of speech or not, and while loving chasten her. Finally, he decided that he would not. She was only his lover as yet: when she should be his wife it would then be time enough to teach her the subdued conventionalism of English feeling as interpreted by the English tongue used commonly by gentlemen and ladies. Meanwhile, he must give her her head, as he inwardly phrased it, so as not frighten her in the beginning and thus make the end more difficult.

"You love me too much," he said in a low voice, half oppressed, half excited by her words, for men are difficult to con-

tent. The love of women given in excess of their demand embarrasses and maybe chills them; and Edgar had a sudden misgiving, discomposing if quite natural, which appeared, as it were, to check him like a horse in mid-career and throw him back on himself disagreeably. He asked himself doubtfully, Should he be able to answer this intense love so as to make the balance even between them? He loved her dearly, passionately—better than he had ever loved any woman of the many before—but he did not love her like this: he knew that well enough.

"I cannot love you too much," said Leam. "You are my life, and you are so great."

"And you will never tire of me?"

She looked into his face, her beautiful eyes worshiping him. "Do we tire of the sun?" she answered.

"Where did you get all your pretty fancies from, my darling?" he cried. "You have developed into a poet as well as a Psyche."

"Have I? If I have developed into anything, it is because I love you," she answered, with her sweet pathetic smile.

"But, my Leam, sweetheart—"

"Ah," she interrupted him with a look of passionate delight, "how I like to hear you call me that! Mamma used to call me her heart. No one else has since—I would not let any one if they had wanted—till now you."

"And you *are* my heart," he answered fervently—"the heart of my heart, my very life!"

"Am I?" she smiled. "And you are mine."

"But, sweetheart, tell me if, when you know me better, you do not find me all you think me now, what then? Will you hate me for very disappointment?"

He asked the question, but as if he believed in himself and the impossibility of her hatred or disappointment while he asked it.

She looked at him with naïve incredulity and surprise. It would have been a challenge to be kissed from any other woman, but Leam, with her fire and passion and personal reticence all in one, had no thought of offering such a challenge, still less of submitting to its consequences.

"Find you all I think?" she repeated slowly. "When I know the saints in heaven, will not they be all I think? Was not Columbus?"

"But I am neither a saint nor a hero," said Edgar, drawing a sprig of lemon-plant which he held in his hand lightly across her face.

"You are both," answered Leam as positively as she used to answer Alick about the ugliness of England and the want of flowers in the woods and hedges, and with as much conviction of her case.

"And you are an angel," he returned.

"No," said Leam quietly, "I am only the woman who loves you."

"Ah, but you must not depreciate yourself for my sake," he said. "My choice, my love, my wife, must be perfect for my own honor. You must respect me in respecting yourself, and if you were to say yes indeed you were an angel, that would only be what is due to me. Don't you see?" pleasantly.

"Yes," she answered. "And only an angel would be good enough for you."

"My sweetest, your flattery is too delicious. It will make me vain and all sorts of bad things," said Edgar with a happy smile, finding this innocent worship one of the most charming tributes ever brought to the shrine of his lordly manhood by woman.

"It is not flattery: you deserve more," said Leam. Then lapsing into her old manner of checked utterance, she added, "I cannot talk, but you should be told."

Edgar thought he had been told pretty often by women the virtues which they had seen in him. Whether they saw what was or what they imagined was not to the point. If love creates, so does vanity, and of the two the latter has the more permanence.

After this there was a long pause. It was as if one chapter had been finished, one cup emptied. Then said Edgar suddenly, "And you will be happy at the Hill?" lightly touching her face again with the lemon-plant.

"With you anywhere," she answered.

"And my mother? Do you remember

when you said one day you would not like to be my mother's daughter? Ah, little puss, you did not know what you were saying; and now tell me, do you object to be my mother's daughter?"

Leam looked grave. "I had not thought of that," she said, a certain shadow of distress crossing her face.

"Does the idea displease you?" he asked, in his turn grave.

"No," she answered after a short silence. "But I only thought of you. Shall I be Mrs. Harrowby's daughter?"

"Of course. How should you not?" he laughed.

"And Miss Josephine's too—two mothers?—mother and daughter both my mothers? I cannot understand," said poor Leam, a little hopelessly.

"Never mind the intricacies now. You are to be my wife: that is all we need remember. Is it not?" bending toward her tenderly.

"Yes," echoed Leam with a sigh of relief. "That is all we need remember."

So the day passed in these broken episodes, these delightful little scenes of the fooling and flattery of love, till the evening came, when Edgar was obliged to go up to the seven-o'clock dinner at the Hill. He might sit with Leam, as he had done, for nearly six hours in the garden, without more comment than that which servants naturally make among themselves, but if he remained through the evening he would publish more than he cared to publish at the present moment. So he had arranged to go back to the family dinner at seven, and thus keep his mother and sisters hoodwinked for a few hours longer.

As the time of parting drew nearer and nearer Leam became strangely sad and silent. Little caressing as she was by nature or habit, of her own accord she had laid her small dry feverish hand in Edgar's, and had gathered herself so much nearer to him that her slight shoulder touched his broad and powerful arm. It was a very faint caress for an engaged girl to offer, but it was an immense concession for Leam to make; and Edgar understood it in its meaning more than its extent. With the former he was delighted enough: the latter would scarcely have contented a man with loose moist lips and the royal habit of taking and having all for which he had a fancy. Nothing that Leam had said or done through the day had told him so plainly as did this quiet and by no means fervent familiarity how much she loved him, and how the power of that love was breaking up her natural reserve.

"It is as if I should never see you again," she said sadly when, looking at his watch, he had exclaimed, "Time's up, my darling! I must be off in five minutes from this. But I shall see you to-morrow," he answered tenderly. "I shall come down in the morning, as I have done to-day, and perhaps you will ride with me. We will go over some of the old ground, where we used to go when I loved you and you did not think you would ever love me. Ah, fairy that you are, how you have bewitched me!"

"That will be good," said Leam, who did not resent it in him that she was compared to a thing that did not exist, but adding with a piteous look, "it is taking my life from me when you go."

"You lovely little darling! I don't like to see you look unhappy, but I do delight to see how much you love me," said Edgar. "But you will not have to part with me for very long now. I shall see you every day till the time comes when we shall never be separated—never, never."

"Ah, that time!" she sighed. "It is far off."

He smiled, as his manner was, behind his beard, so that she did not see it. "It shall not be far off," he said gravely. "And now," looking again at his watch and then at the sky, "I must go."

The storm that had been threatening through the day was now gathering to a head, and even as Edgar spoke the first flash came, the first distant peal of thunder sounded, the first heavy raindrops fell. There was evidently going to be a fearful tempest, and Edgar must leave now at once if he would not be in the thick of it before he reached home.

"Yes," said Leam, noting the change in the sky, and unselfish always, "you must go."

They rose and turned toward the house. Hand in hand they walked slowly across the lawn and entered the drawing-room by the way of the window, by the way by which she had entered twice before—once when she had disclaimed madame, and once when she had welcomed Josephine.

Tears were in her eyes: her heart had failed her.

"It is like losing you for ever," she said again.

"No, not for ever—only till to-morrow," he answered.

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" she replied. "There will be no to-morrow."

"Yes, yes: in a very few hours we shall have come to that blessed day," he said cheerfully. "Kiss me, darling, that I may carry away your sweetest memory till I see you again. You will kiss me, Leam, of your own free will to-night, will you not?" He said this a little tremulously, his arms round her.

"Yes," she answered, "I will kiss you to-night."

She turned her face to him and put her hands round his neck frankly: then with an uncontrollable impulse she flung herself against his breast and, clasping her arms tight, bent his head down to her level and kissed him on the forehead with the passionate sorrow, the reluctant despair of an eternal farewell. It was something that irresistibly suggested death.

Edgar was distressed at her manner, distressed to have to leave her; but he must. Life is made up of petty duties, paltry obligations. Great events come but rarely and are seldom uninterrupted. A shower of rain and the dinner-hour are parts of the mosaic and help in the catastrophe which looks as if it had been the offspring of the moment. And just now the supreme exigencies to be attended to were the dinner-hour at the Hill and the rain that was beginning to fall.

Saddened, surprised, yet gratified too by her emotion, Edgar answered it in his own way. He kissed her again and again, smoothed her hair, passed his hand over her soft fresh cheeks, held her to him tightly clasped; and Leam did not refuse his caresses. She seemed to have suddenly abandoned all the characteristics of her former self: the mask had fallen finally, and her soul, released from its long imprisonment, was receiving its gift, not of tongues, but of fire—not of healing, but of suffering.

"My darling," he half whispered, "I shall see you to-morrow. Come, do not be so cast down: it is not reasonable, my heart. And tears in those sweet eyes? My Leam, dry them: they are too beautiful for tears. Look up, my darling. Give me one happy little smile, and remember to-morrow and for all our lives after."

But Leam could not smile. Her face was set to its old mask of tragedy and sorrow. Something, she knew not what, had passed out of her life, and something had come into it—something that Edgar for the moment could neither restore nor yet banish. He pressed her to him for the last time, kissed her passive face again and again, caught the scent of the lemon-plant in her hair where he had placed it, and left her. As he passed through the gate the storm burst in all its fury, and Leam went up into her own room in a voiceless, tearless grief that made the whole earth a desert and all life desolation.

She did know herself this evening, nor understand what it was that ailed her. She had only consciously loved for two days, and this was the anguish to which she had been brought. No, not even when mamma died had she suffered as she was suffering now. She felt as if she had lost him even as she had lost her. She did not believe in to-morrow: it would never come. She would never be with him again as she had been to-day. No self-reasoning, feebly aimed at, could calm her or convince her of the folly of her fears. He had gone, she was left, and they were parted for ever.

She sat by the window desolate, deserted, more alone than she had ever been before, because she had lost more than she had ever either held or lost before. The storm that was raging in the sky grew gradually stronger and came still nearer, but she scarcely noticed it:

it was only as the symphony sounding in sad harmony with her unspoken wail. Flash followed flash, swifter, nearer, more vivid; the thunder crashed and roared as if it would have beaten the house to the ground and rent the very earth whereon it stood; the rain fell in torrents that broke the flowers like hail and ran in turbulent rivulets along the paths. Never had there been such a furious tempest as this at North Aston since the days of tradition. It made the people in the village below quail and cry out that the day of judgment had come upon them: it made Leam at last forget her sorrow and quail in her solitude as if her day of judgment too had come upon her.

Then there came one awful flash that seemed to set the whole room on fire; and as Leam started up, thinking that the place was indeed in flames, her eyes fell on the Tables of the Ten Commandments given her by madame; and there, in letters of blood that seemed to cry out against her like a voice, she saw by the light of that accusing flash those words of terrible significance to her:

THOU SHALT DO NO MURDER!

"'THOU SHALT DO NO MURDER!'"

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PART X.

CHAPTER XXXVII.
UNWORTHY.

THE storm had passed with the night, and the day was bright and joyful—almost hard in its brightness and cruel in its joy; for while the sun was shining overhead and the air was musical with the hum of insects and the song of birds, the flowers were broken, the tender plants destroyed, the uncut corn was laid as if a troop of horse had trampled down the crops, and the woods, like the gardens and the fields, were wrecked and spoiled. But of all the mourners sighing between earth and sky, Nature is the one that never repents, and the sun shines out over the saddest ruin as it shines out over the richest growth, as careless of the one as of the other.

Edgar came down from the Hill in the sunshine, handsome, strong, jocund as the day. As he rode through the famous double avenue of chestnuts he thought, What a glorious day! how clear and full of life after the storm! but he noted the wreckage too, and was concerned to see how the trees and fields had suffered. Still, the one would put forth new branches and fresh leaves next year; and if the other had been roughly handled, there was yet a salvage to be garnered. The ruin was not irreparable, and he was in the mood to make the best of things. Do not the first days of a happy love ever give the happiest kind of philosophy for man and woman to go on?

And he was happy in his love. Who more so? He was on his way now to Ford House as a man going to his own, serene and confident of his possession. He had left his treasure overnight, and he went to take it up again, sure to find it where he had laid it down. He had no thought of the thief who might have stolen it in the dark hours, of the rust that might have cankered it in the chill of the gray morning. He only pictured to himself its beauty, its sweetness and undimmed radiance—only remembered that this treasure was his, his own and his only, unshared by any, and known in its excellence by none before him.

He rode up to the door glad, dominant, assured. Life was very pleasant to the strong man and ardent lover—the English gentleman with his happiness in his own keeping, and his future marked out in a clear broad pathway before him. There was no cloud in his sky, no shadow on his sea: it was all sunshine and serenity—man the master of his own fate and the ruler of circumstance—man the supreme over all things, a woman's past included.

Not seeing Leam in the garden, Edgar rang the bell, and was shown into the drawing-room, where she was sitting alone. The down-drawn blinds had darkened the room to a pleasant gloom for eyes somewhat overpowered by the blazing sunshine and the dazzling white clouds flung like heaps of snow against the hard bright blue of the sky; yet something struck more chill than restful on the lover as he came through the doorway, little fanciful or sentimental as he was.

Leam, who had not been in bed through the night, was sitting on the sofa in the remotest and darkest part of the room. She rose as he entered—rose only, not coming forward to meet him, but standing in her place silent, pale, yet calm and collected. She did not look at him, but neither did she blush nor tremble. There was something statuesque, almost dead, about her—something that was not the same Leam whom he had known from the first.

He went up to her, both hands held out. She shrank back and folded hers in each other, still not looking at him.

"Why, Leam, what is it?" he cried in amazement, pained, shocked at her action. Was she in her right mind? Had

she heard of his former attentions to Adelaide, divined their ultimate meaning, and been seized with a mad idea of sacrifice and generosity? It must be with Adelaide, he thought, rapidly reviewing his past. He was absolutely safe about Violet Cray, who had never known his name; and those later Indian affairs were dead and as good as buried. What, then, did it mean?

"No, not till you have heard me," said Leam in a low voice. "And never after."

"My darling! what is it?" he repeated.

"You must not call me dear names: I am unworthy," said Leam. "No," checking him as he would have spoken, smiling with a sense of relief that her craze—if it was a craze—went to the visionary side of her own unworthiness, and was not due to any knowledge of his misdemeanors, as she might think them. "Do not speak. I have to tell you. I had forgotten it," she went on to say in the same tense, compressed manner—the manner of one who has a task to get through, and has gathered all her strength for the effort, leaving none to be squandered in emotion—"I was so happy in these last days I had forgotten it. Now I have remembered, and we must part."

Edgar was grieved to see her in such deadly trouble, for it was easy to see her pain beneath her still exterior, but he was confident, and if grieved not afraid. Leam's little life, so innocent and uneventful as it must have been, could hold no such tremendous evil, could have been smirched with no such damning stain, as that at which she seemed to hint. Grant even that there had been something more between her and Alick Corfield than he would quite like to hear—which was his first thought—still, that more must needs be very little, could but be very simple. His wife must be spotless—that he knew, and he would marry none whose past was not as unsullied as new-fallen snow, as unsullied as must be her future—absolute purity—the unruffled emotions of a maidenhood undisturbed until now even by dreams, even by visions. He owed it to himself and his position that his wife, man of many loves as he was, should be this; but at the worst the childish affection of brother and sister, which was all that could possibly have been between Leam and that awkward young gangrel Alick Corfield, could have nothing in it that he ought to take to heart or that should influence him. Yes, he might smile and not be afraid. And indeed her delicate conscience was another grace in his eyes. He loved her more than ever for the honesty that must confess all its little sins. Sweet Leam! Leam having to confess! Leam! she who was almost too modest for an ordinary lover's comfort, needing to be tamed out of her savage bashfulness, not to be reproved for transgressing the proper reticence of an English maid. It was a pretty play, but it was only a play.

"Come and sit by me and make full confession, my darling," he said lovingly.

"I will stand where I am. You sit," said Leam, without looking at him.

He seated himself on the sofa. "And now what has my little culprit to say for herself?" he asked pleasantly, putting on a playful magisterial air.

"It is over," said Leam, her hands pressed in each other with so tight a clasp that the strained knuckles were white and started. "You must not love me: I cannot be your wife."

"Why?" He showed his square white teeth beneath the golden sweep of his moustache, his moist red lips parted, always smiling.

"I have done a great crime," said Leam in a low, monotonous voice.

"A crime! That is a large word for a small peccadillo—larger than any sin of yours merits, my sweetheart."

"You do not know," said Leam with a despairing gesture. "How can you know when you have not heard?"

"Well, what may be its name?" he asked, willing to humor her.

She paused for a moment: then with a visible effort, drawing in her breath, she said, in a voice that was unnaturally calm and low, "I killed madame."

"Leam!" cried Edgar, "how can you talk such nonsense? The thing is growing beyond a joke. Unsay your words: they are a wrong done to *me*."

He had started to his feet while he spoke, and now stood before her with a strangely scared and startled face. Naturally, as such a man would, he was resolute not to accept such a terrible confession, and one so unlikely, so impossible; but something in the girl's voice and manner, something in its sad, still reality, seemed to overpower his determination to find this simply a bad joke which she was playing off on his credulity. And then the thing fitted only too well. He had heard half a dozen times of Madame de Montfort's sudden death, and how very strange it was that the draught which she had taken so often with impunity before should have been found so laden with prussic acid on the first night of her homecoming as to kill her in an instant—how strange, too, that not the strictest search or inquiry could come upon a trace of such poison bought or possessed by any member of the family, for what police-officer would look to find a sixty-minim bottle of prussic acid concealed among the coils of a young girl's hair? And when Leam said in that quiet if desperate manner that it was she who had killed madame, her words made the whole mystery clear and solved the as yet unsolved problem.

Nevertheless, he would not believe her, but said again, passionately, "Unsay your words, Leam: they offend me."

"I cannot," said Leam.

He laughed scornfully. "Kill Madame de Montfort. Absurd! You could not. It was impossible for a girl like you to kill any one," he cried in broken sentences. "How could you do such a thing, Leam, and not be found out? Silly child! you are raving."

"I put poison into the bottle, and she died," said Leam in a half whisper.

"Leam! you a murderess!"

She quivered at the word, at the tone of loathing, of abhorrence, of almost terror, in which he said it, but she held her terrible ground. She had begun her martyrdom, her agony of atonement for the sake of truth and love, and she must go through now to the end. "Yes," she said, "I am a murderess. Now you know all, and why you must not love me."

"I cannot believe you," he pleaded helplessly. "It is too horrible. My darling, say that you have told me this to try me—that it is not true, and that you are still my own, my very own, my pure and sinless Leam."

He knelt at her feet, clasping her waist. He was not of those who, like Alick, could bear the sin of the beloved as the sacrifice of pride, of self, of soul to that love. He himself might be stained from head to heel with the soil of sin, but his wife must be, as has been said, without flaw or blemish, immaculate and free from fault. Any lapse, involving the loss of repute should it ever be made public, would have been the death-knell of his hopes, the requiem of his love; but such an infamy as this! If true it was only too final.

"Oh, no! no! do not do that," cried Leam, trying to unclasp his hands. "Do not kneel to me. I ought to kneel to you," she added with a little cry that struck with more than pity to Edgar's heart, and that nearly broke her down for so much relaxing of the strain, so much yielding to her grief, as it included.

"Leam, tell me you are joking—tell me that you did not do this awful thing," he cried again, his handsome face, blanched and drawn, upturned to her in agony.

She put her hands over her eyes. "I cannot lie to you," she said. "And I must not degrade you. Do not touch me: I am not good enough to be touched by you."

He loosened his arms, and she shrank from him almost as if she faded away.

"Why did you deceive me?" he groaned. "You should not have let me love you, knowing the truth."

"I did not know that you loved me, or that I loved you, till that night," she pleaded piteously. "If I had known I would have prevented it. I have told you as soon as I remembered."

"You have broken my heart," he cried, flinging himself on the sofa, his face buried in the cushions. And then, strong man as he was, a brave soldier and an English country gentleman, he burst into a passion of tears that shook him as the storm had shaken the earth last night—

tears that were the culmination of his agony, not its relief.

Leam stood by him as pale as the shattered lilies in the garden. What could she do? How could she comfort him? Tainted and dishonored, she dared not even lay her hand on his—her infamous and murderous hand, and he so pure and noble! Neither could she pray for him, nor yet for herself. Pray? to whom? To God? God had turned His face away from her, even as her lover had now turned away his: He was angry with her, and still unappeased. She dared not pray to Him, and He would not hear her if she did. The saints were no longer the familiar and parental deities, grave and helpful, to whom she could refer all her sorrows and perplexities, as in earlier times, sure of speedy succor. The teaching of the later days had destroyed the simple fetichism of childhood; and now—afraid of God, by whom she was unforgiven; the saints swept out of her spiritual life like those mist-wreaths of morning which were once taken for solid towers and impregnable fortresses; the Holy Mother vanished with the rest; all spiritual help a myth, all spiritual consolation gone—how could she pray? Lonely as her life had been since mamma died, it had never been so lonely as now, when she felt that God had abandoned her, and that she had sacrificed her lover to her sense of truth and honor and what was due to his nobility.

She stood by him and watched his passionate outburst with anguish infinitely more intense than his own. To have caused him this sorrow was worse than to have endured it for herself. There was no sacrifice of self that she could not have made for his good. Spaniard as she was, she would have been above jealousy if another woman would have made him happier than she; and if her death would have given him gain or joy, she would have died for him as another would have lived. Yet it was she, and she only, who was causing him this pain, who was destroying his happiness and breaking his heart.

She dared not speak nor move. It took all the strength she drew from silence to keep her from breaking into a more terrible storm of grief than even that into which he had fallen. She dared not make a sign, but simply stood there, doing her best to bear her heavy burden to the end. The only feeling that she had for herself was that it was cruel not to let her die, and why did not mute anguish kill her?

For the rest, she knew that she had done the thing that was right, however hard. It was not fitting that she should be his wife; and it was better that he should suffer for the moment than be degraded for all time by association with one so shameful, so dishonored, as herself.

Presently, Edgar cleared his eyes and lifted up his face. He was angry with himself for this unmanly burst of feeling, and because angry with himself disposed for the moment to be hard on her. She was standing there in exactly the same spot and just the same attitude as before, her head a little bent, her hands twined in each other, her eyes with the pleading, frightened look of confession turned timidly to him; but as he raised himself from the sofa, pushing back his hair and striding to the window as if to hide the fact of his having shed tears, she turned her eyes to the floor. She was beginning to feel now that she must not even look at him. The gulf that separated them, dug by her own ineffaceable crime, was so deep, the distance so wide!

A painful silence fell between them: then Edgar, not looking at her, said in a constrained voice, "I will keep your dreadful secret, Leam, sacredly for ever. You feel sure of that, I hope. But, as you say, we must part. I do not pretend to be better than other men, but I could not take as my wife one who had been guilty of such an awful crime as this."

"No," said Leam, her parched lips scarcely able to form a word at all.

"Your secret will be safe with me," he repeated.

She did not reply. In giving up himself she had given up all that made life lovely, and the refuse might as well go as not.

"But we must part."

"Yes," said Leam.

He turned back to the window, desperately troubled. He did really love her, passionately, sincerely. He longed at this very moment to take her in his arms and tell her that he would accept her crime if only he might have herself. Had he not been the master of the Hill and a Harrowby he would have done so, but the master of the Hill and the head of the house of Harrowby had a character to maintain and a social ideal to keep pure. He could not bring into such a home as his, present to his mother as her daughter, to his sisters as their sister, a girl who by her own confession was a murderess—a girl who, if the law had its due, would be hanged by the neck in the precincts of the county jail till she was dead. He might have been sinful enough in his own life, in the ordinary way of men — and truly there were passages in his past that would scarcely bear the light — but what were the worst of his misdemeanors compared with this awful crime? No: he must resolutely crush the last lingering impulse of tenderness, and leave her to work through her own tribulation, as he also must work through his.

"But we must part," he said for a third time.

Her lips quivered. She did not answer, only bent her head in sign of acquiescence.

"It is hard to say it, harder still to do; and I who loved you so dearly!" cried Edgar with the angry despair of a man forced against himself to give up his desire.

She put up her hands. "Don't!" she said with a sharp cry. "I cannot bear to hear about your love."

He gave a sudden sob. Her love for him was very precious to him — his for her very strong.

"Why did you tell me?" he then said. "And yet you did the right thing to tell me: I was wrong to say that. It was good of you, Leam — noble, like yourself."

"I love you. That is not being noble," she answered slowly and with infinite pathos. "I could not have deceived you after I remembered."

"You are too noble to deceive," he said, holding out his hand.

Leam turned away. "I am not fit to touch your hand," she said, the very pride of contrition in her voice — pride for him, if humiliation for herself.

"For this once," he pleaded.

"I am unworthy," she answered.

At this moment little Fina came jumping into the room. She had in her hand a rose-colored scarf that had once been poor madame's, and which the nurse, turning out an old box of hers, had found and given to the child.

After she had kissed Edgar, played with his *bréloques*, looked at the works of his watch, plaited his beard into three strings, and done all that she generally did in the way of welcome, she shook out the gauze scarf over her dress.

"This was mamma's—my own mamma's," she said. "Leam will never tell me about mamma: you tell me, Major Harrowby," coaxingly.

"I cannot: I did not know her," said Edgar in an altered voice, while Leam looked as if her judgment had come, but bore it as she had borne all the rest, resolutely.

"I want to hear about mamma, and who killed her," pouted Fina.

"Hush, Fina," said Leam in an agony: "you must not talk."

"You always say that, Leam, when I want to hear about mamma," was the child's petulant reply.

"Go away now, dear little Fina," said Edgar, who felt all that Leam must feel at these inopportune words, and who, moreover, weak as he was in this direction, was longing for one last caress.

"I will go and send her nurse," said Leam, half staggering to the door.

Had anything been wanting to show her the impossibility of their marriage, this incident of Fina's random but incisive words would have been enough.

"Leam! not one word more?" he asked as he stood against the door, holding the handle in his hand.

"No," she said hopelessly. "What words can we have together?"

"And we are parting like this, and for ever?"

"For ever. Yes, it has to be for ever," she answered almost mechanically.

"Leam, why did you love me?" he cried, taking her hands in his and keeping them.

"How could I help it? Who would not love you?" she answered.

Again he gave a sudden heavy sob, and again the poor pale, tortured face reflected the pain it witnessed.

"Good-bye!" she then said, drawing her hands from his. "Remember only, when you blame me, that I told you, not to let you be degraded. And forgive me before I die, for I loved you—ah, better than my own life!"

With a sudden impulse she stooped forward, took back his right hand in both of hers, pressed it to her bosom, kissed it passionately again and again, then turned with one faint, half-suppressed moan, and left him. And as he heard her light feet cross the hall, wearily, heavily, as the feet of a mourner dragging by the grave of the beloved, he knew that his dream of love was over. But, with the strange satire of the senses in moments of sorrow, noting ever the most trivial things, Edgar noted specially the powerful perfume of a spray of lemon-plant which she bruised as she pressed his hand against her breast.

That evening Edgar Harrowby went down to the rectory. He was strong enough in physique and in some phases of will, but he was not strong all through, and he had never been able to face unassisted the first desolation of a love-disappointment.

Adelaide, in a picturesque dress and her most becoming mood, welcomed him with careful cordiality as a prodigal whose husks, clinging about his coat, were to be handled tenderly as if they were pearls. She saw that something was gravely wrong, and she grasped the line of connection if she did not understand the issue; but, mindful of the doctrine of letting well alone—also of that of catching a heart at the rebound—she made no allusion in the beginning, but let her curiosity gnaw her like the Spartan boy's fox without making a sign. At last, however, her curiosity became impatience, and her impatience conquered her reserve. She was clever in her generation and fairly self-controlled, but she was only a woman, after all.

"And when did you see that eccentric little lady, Miss Leam?" she asked with a smile—not a bitter smile, merely one of careless amusement, as if Leam was acknowledged to be a comical subject of conversation and one naturally provoking a smile.

"Dear Adelaide," said Edgar, not looking at her, but speaking with unusual earnestness, "do not speak ill of Leam Dundas—neither to me nor to any one else. I ask it as a favor."

Adelaide turned pale. "Tell me only one thing, Edgar: are you going to marry her?" she asked, her manner as earnest as his own, but with a different meaning.

"No. Marry her? Good God, no!" was his vehement reply. Then more tenderly: "But for all that do not speak ill of her. Will you promise, dear, good friend?"

"Yes, I will promise," she answered with what was for her fervor and a sudden look of intense relief. "I never will again, Edgar; and I am sorry if I have hurt you at any time by what I may have said. I did not mean to do so."

"No, I know you did not. I can appreciate your motives, and they were good," Edgar answered with emotion; and then their two pairs of fine blue eyes met, and both pairs were moist.

This was just at the moment when Leam, pale, rigid as a statue, thickly veiled, and holding a box in her hand, met Mr. Gryce in Steel's Wood, he having gone to catch such rare specimens of sleeping lepidoptera as the place afforded and his eyes could discern.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLOTTED OUT.

GONE! no one knew where. Gone in the night like a falling star, like a passing cloud—gone and left no trace, van-

ished like the sunshine of yesterday or the flowers of last spring! No one knew what had become of her, and no one knew where to look for her; for the sole information gathered by the scared neighbors was, that Leam Dundas was missing and no one had seen her go.

She was thought by some to have simply run away after the manner of undisciplined youth aiming at mock heroism; but where, or with whom? for, said the keen-eyed women and large-mouthed men, incredulous of maiden meditation fancy free, a pretty young thing of nineteen would never have left her comfortable home, her father, friends and good name, without some lover stirring in the matter. And this lover was just the missing link not to be found anywhere. Others said she had drowned herself; but here, again, Why? Young girls do not give up their precious freight of hope in love and present joy in youth for a trifling ailment or a temporary annoyance. And nothing worse than either could have befallen Leam, said the reasoners, putting their little twos and twos together and totting up the items with the serene accuracy of spiritual arithmeticians, dealing with human emotion as if it was a sum in long division which any schoolboy could calculate.

Edgar Harrowby, however, who came forward manfully enough to say when and where—if not how—he had last seen Miss Dundas, leant to the side of the believers in suicide, and on his own responsibility ordered the Broad to be dragged. Which looked ugly, said a few of the rasher spirits in the village, cherishing suspicion of their betters as the birthright which had never had a chance of being bartered for a mess of pottage; while the more contemptuous, critical after the event, gave it as their opinion that the major had a bee in his bonnet somewhere, for what gentleman in his seven sane senses would have looked for such a mare's nest as Miss Leam Dundas lying among the bulrushes of the Broad? Drowned herself? No: it was no drowning of herself that had come to little miss, be sure of that.

What, however, had come to her no one knew. The fact only was certain: she had gone, and no one had met her coming or seen her going, and for all trace left she might as well have melted into air like one of the fairy women of romance. To be sure, the servants had heard her in her room in the early evening, and she had refused the tea which they had brought her, and told them, through the closed door, that she wanted nothing more that night. So they left her to herself, supposing her to be in one of her queer moods, to which they were used to give but scant heed, and not thinking more about her. The next morning she was missing, but when she had gone was as dark as where.

The discovery, later in the day, that certain effects, such as her mother's dressing-case and a few personal necessities of daily use, were gone too, seemed to dispose effectually of the theory of suicide; though what remained, a lover, companion of her flight, being wanting? It was a strange thing altogether, and the country was alive with wild theories and wild reports. But in a few days a letter from Mr. Dundas to the rector, and another to Edgar, set the question of self-destruction at rest, though also they gave loose to other energies of conjecture, for in both he said, "No harm has come to her, and I am content to let her remain where she has elected to place herself."

As it was just this *where* which tormented the folk with the sense of mystery and made them eager for news, the father's meagre explanation—which, in point of fact, was no explanation at all—was not found very satisfactory, and a few hard words were said of Mr. Dundas, his reserve to the world being taken for the same thing as indifference to his daughter, and resented as an offence. But for the third time in his life Sebastian was found capable of maintaining this impenetrable reserve. Pepita's true status in her own country—madame's suspicious debts and those damaging letters from London—Leam's hiding-place: he had had strength enough to keep his own counsel about the first two unbroken, and now he betrayed no more about this last. It may as well be said

that for this he had sufficient reason. Leam, who had confessed her crime, and announced her intention of flight and of hiding herself where no one should find her again, had not told him more than these bare bones of the story. And he did not care to know more. The skeleton was horrible enough as it stood: he was by no means inclined to clothe it with the flesh of detail, still less to follow his erring child to her place of exile. He was content that she should be blotted out. It was the sole reparation that she could make.

This sudden disappearance ended the foreign tour which had been Josephine's sweetest anticipations of the honeymoon, for Mr. Dundas turned back for home at once, intending to put up Ford House for sale and leave the place for ever. He was ashamed to live at North Aston, he said, after Leam's extraordinary conduct, her shameful, shameless *esclandre*, which—said Josephine to her own people, weeping—she supposed was due to her, the poor little thing not liking her for a stepmother.

"Though, indeed, she need not have been afraid," said the good creature effusively, "for I had intended to be kindness itself to the poor dear girl."

And when she said this, Mrs. Harrowby who never failed an opportunity for moral cautery, remarked dryly, "In all probability it is as well as it is, Josephine. You would have been very uncomfortable with her, and would have been sure to have spoiled her. And, as Adelaide Birkett always says, very sensibly, she is odd enough already. She need not be made more so."

Maria threw out a doubt as to whether Mr. Dundas had heard from Leam at all. It was not like Sebastian to be so close, she said; but Josephine assured her that he had, and bridled a little at the vapory insinuation that Sebastian was not perfect. She detailed the whole circumstance with all the facts fully fringed and feathered. He had received the letter just as they were preparing to go to the Louvre, but he had not shown it to her, and she had not asked to see it. She saw, though, that he was much agitated when he read it, but he had put it in his pocket, and when she looked for it it was not there. All that he had said was, "Leam has left home, Josephine, and we must go back at once." Of course she had not asked questions, she said with a pleasant little assumption of wifely submission. Her search in her husband's pockets was only what might have been expected from the average woman, but the wifely submission was special.

For this curtailment of their sister's enjoyment Maria and Fanny judged Leam almost more severely than for any other delinquency involved in her flight. They spoke as if she had planned it purposely to vex her father and his bride in their honeymoon and deprive them of their lawful pleasure; but Josephine never blamed her as they did, and when they were most bitter cast in her little words of soothing and excused her with more zeal than evidence—excused her sometimes to the point of making her sisters angry with her and inclined to accuse her of her old failing, meek-spiritedness carried to the verge of self-abasement.

But the one who suffered most of all those left to lament or to wonder was poor Alick Corfield. It was a misery to see him with his hollow cheeks and haggard eyes, like an animal that has been hunted into lone places, terrified and looking for a way of escape, or like a dog that has lost its master. He tried every method known to him to gain information of her directly or indirectly, but Mr. Dundas, ignorant himself, had only to guard that ignorance from breaking out. As for knowledge, he could not give what he did not possess, and the terrible thing that he did know he was not likely to let appear.

One day when the poor fellow broke down, as was not unusual with him when asking about Leam—and Mr. Dundas read him like a book, all save that one black page where the beloved name stood inscribed in letters of his own heart's blood between the words "crime" and "murder"—with a woman's liking for saying pleasant things which soothed those who heard them, and did no hurt to those who said them save for the in-

significant manner in which falsehood hurts the soul, Sebastian, laying his hand kindly on the poor fellow's angular shoulder, said, "I am sorry to know as much as I do, Alick. There is no one to whom I would have given her so readily as to you, my dear boy. Indeed, it was always one of my hopes for the future, poor misguided child! and I can see that it was yours too. Ah, how I grieve that it is impossible!"

"Why impossible?" asked Alick, who had the faculty of faith, his pale face flushing.

Mr. Dundas turned white. A look not so much of pain as of abhorrence came into his face. "Impossible!" he said vehemently. "I would not curse my greatest enemy with my daughter's hand."

Alick felt his blood run cold. What did he mean? Did he know all, or was he speaking only with the angry feeling of a man who had been disappointed and annoyed? There was a short pause. Then said Alick, looking straight into Sebastian's eyes and speaking very slowly, but with not too much emphasis, "I would hold myself blessed with her as my wife had she even committed murder."

Mr. Dundas started perceptibly. "Oh," he answered after a moment's hesitation, with a forced and sickly kind of smile, "a silly girl's wrong-headedness does not reach quite so far as that. She has done wrong, miserably wrong, but between withdrawing herself from her father's house and committing such a crime as murder there is rather a wide difference. All the same, I am disgraced by her folly," angrily, "and I will not let any one—not even you, Alick—know where she is."

"That is cruel to those who love her," pleaded Alick, his eyes filling with tears.

"If cruel it is necessary," said Mr. Dundas.

"But she must need friends about her now more than she ever did," urged Alick. "Tell me at least where to find her, that I may do what I can to console her."

Mr. Dundas shook his head. "No," he said sternly. "She is dead to me, and shall be dead to my friends. She is blotted out from my love, and I will blot her out from my memory; and no one's persuasions can bring back what is effaced. Now, my dear boy, let us understand one another. I have surprised your secret: you love my daughter, and had she been worthy of you I would have given her to you more willingly than to any one I know. But she herself has fixed the gulf between us, which I will not pass nor help any one else to pass. Learn to look on her as dead, for she is dead to me, to you, to the world."

"Never to me," cried Alick. "While she lives she must be always to me what she has been from the first day I saw her. Whatever she has done, I shall always love her as much as I do now."

"You are faithful," replied Sebastian, "but trust me, boy, no woman that ever lived was worth so much fidelity. I will protect you against your own wish, and be your friend in spite of yourself. You shall not know where she is, and you shall not throw yourself away on her. As she has elected to be effaced, she shall be effaced—blotted out for ever."

"Then I will consecrate my life to finding her," cried Alick warmly.

Mr. Dundas shrugged his shoulders. "Who can persuade a willful man against his folly?" he said coldly. "You are following a marsh-light, my boy, and if you do find it you will only be landed in a bog."

"If I find her I shall have found my reward," Alick answered with boyish fervor. "It will be happiness enough for me if I can bring back one smile to her face or lighten one hour of its sorrow."

"Let well alone," said Mr. Dundas; but Alick answered, "Not till it is well; and God will help me."

Whereupon the interview ended, and Alick left the house, feeling something as one of the knights of old might have felt when he had vowed himself to the quest of the Holy Grail.

When Mr. Dundas came home, naturally the families called, as in duty bound and by inclination led. Excitement con-

cerning Ford House was at its height, for there were two things to keep it alive —the one to see how the bride and bridegroom looked, the other to try and pick up something definite about Leam. And among the rest came Mr. Gryce, with his floating white locks falling about his bland cherubic face, his mild blue eyes with their trick of turning red on small provocation, and his lisping manner of speech, ingenuous, interrogatory, and knowing nothing when interrogated in his turn—somehow gleaning full ears wherever he passed, and dropping not even a solitary stalk of straw in return. He expressed his sorrow that he had not seen lately his young friend, Miss Dundas.

"In my secluded life," he said, his eyelids reddening, "she is like a beautiful bird that flashes through the dull sky for a moment, but leaves the atmosphere brighter than before." He glanced round the room as if looking for her. "I hope she is well?" he added, not attempting to conceal a certain accent of disappointment at her absence.

"Quite well when I heard from her," answered Mr. Dundas, doing his best to speak without embarrassment.

Mr. Gryce turned his face in frank astonishment on the speaker. "Ah! She is from home, then?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Dundas curtly.

"I had not heard," lisped the tenant of Lionnet. "But I myself have been from home for a few days, and have just returned. Though, indeed, present or absent, I know very little of my neighbors' doings, as you may see. I did not even know that Miss Dundas was from home."

"Yet it was pretty widely talked about," said Mr. Dundas, with a certain suspicious glance at the cherubic face smiling innocently into his.

"Doubtless the absence of Miss Dundas must have caused a gap," replied Mr. Gryce, "but you see, as I said, I have been away myself, and when I am at home I do not gossip."

"Have— Where have you been?" asked Mr. Dundas abruptly, with that sudden glance as suddenly withdrawn which tells of a half-formed suspicion neither dwelt on nor clearly made out.

"To Paris," said Mr. Gryce demurely. "I went to see—"

"Oh! you went to see Notre Dame and La Madeleine of course," interrupted Sebastian satirically.

"No," answered Mr. Gryce with a cherubic smile. "Strange to say, I had business connected with that odd drama of *Le Sphinx*."

There was not much more talk after this, and Mr. Gryce soon took his leave, desiring to be most respectfully remembered to Miss Dundas when her father next wrote, and to say that he was keeping some pretty specimens of moths for her on her return; both of which messages Sebastian promised to convey at the earliest opportunity, improvising a counter-remark of Leam's which he was sorry he could not remember accurately, but it was something about butterflies and Mr. Gryce, though what it was he could not positively say.

"Never mind: I will take the will for the deed," said the naturalist as he smiled himself through the doorway.

And when he had gone Josephine declared that she did not care if he never came again: there was something she did not like about him. Pushed for a reason by her husband, who always assumed a logical and masculine tone to her, she had not one to produce, but she stumbled as if by chance on the word "sinister," which was just what Mr. Gryce was not. So Sebastian made her go into the library for the dictionary and hunt up the word through all its derivations, and thus proved to her incontestably that she was ignorant of the English language and of human nature in about equal proportions.

It was soon remarked at the post-office that no letter addressed to Miss Dundas ever left North Aston, and that none came to Mr. Dundas or any one else in the queer, cramped handwriting which experience had taught Mrs. Pepper, postmistress as well as the keeper of the village general shop, carried the sentiments of Leam Dundas. This caused a curious little buzz in the lower parts of the hive

when Mrs. Pepper mentioned it to her friends and gossips; but as no fire can live without fresh fuel, and as nothing whatever was heard of Leam to stimulate curiosity or set new tales afloat, by degrees her name dropped out of the daily discussions of the place, and she was no longer interesting, because she had become used up and talked out.

Only, Mr. Gryce wrote more frequently than had been his wont to Miss Gryce at Windy Brow in Cumberland—conjectured to be his sister; and only, Alick never ceased in his attempts to discover where his lost queen was hidden, though these attempts had hitherto been hopelessly baffled, partly because he had not an inch of foothold whence to make his first spring, nor the thinnest clew to tell him which path to take.

And as a purchaser, the final cause of whose existence seemed to have been the unquestioning possession of Ford House, came suddenly on the scene and took the whole thing as it stood, Sebastian and his wife left the place, taking Fina with them, and migrated to Paris to finish their interrupted honeymoon. So now it was supposed that the last link connecting Leam with North Aston was broken, and that she was indeed blotted out and for ever.

True love is faithful, and Alick Corfield's love was true. Had all the world forsaken her, he would have remained immovable in his old place and attitude of devotion — the one fixed idea always possessing him to find her in her retreat and restore her to self-respect and happiness by his undying love. But how to find her? All sorts of mad projects passed through his brain, but mad projects need some methods, and methods in harmony with existing conditions, if they are to bring success; and Alick's vague resolves to go out and look for her had no more meaning in them than the random moves of a bad chessplayer.

Had Sir Lancelot lived at the present time, he would have gone to Camelot by express, like meaner souls; and had Sir Galahad set out on his quest in the latter half of the nineteenth century, he would have either advertised in the newspapers or have employed a detective for the first part of his undertaking. So, had Alick gone to Scotland Yard and taken the police into his confidence, Leam would have been found in less than a week; but as he shrank from bringing her into contact with the force mainly associated with crime, he was left to his own devices unassisted, and these devices ended only in constantly-recurring disappointment, and consequent increase of sorrow.

His sorrow indeed was so great, and told on him so heavily, that every one said he was going to die. He had been left thin and gaunt enough by his illness, but distress of mind, coupled with weakness of body, reduced him to a kind of sketchy likeness of Don Quixote — his pure soul and honest nature the only beautiful things about him — while his mother's heart was as nearly broken as his own.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WINDY BROW.

WHILE North Aston was employing its time in wondering, and Alick Corfield was breaking his heart in sorrowing, Leam was doing battle with her despair and distress at Windy Brow—doing the best she could to keep her senses clear and to live through the penance which she had inflicted on herself.

So far, Mrs. Pepper's conclusions, based on a badly-gummed envelope, were right: Miss Gryce of Windy Brow was the sister of Mr. Gryce of Lionnet, though even Mrs. Pepper did not know that Leam Dundas, under the name of Leonora Darley, was living with her.

It is not the most obvious agents that are the most influential. The greatest things in Nature are the work of the smallest creatures, and our lives are manipulated far more by unseen influences, known only to ourselves, than by those patent to the world. In all North Aston, Mr. Gryce was the man who had apparently the least hold on the place and the slightest connection with the people. He had come there by accident, and by choice lived in retirement,

though also by choice he had not been there a month before he knew all there was to be known of every individual for miles round. The merest chances had made him personally acquainted with Sebastian Dundas — those chances his tenancy of Lionnet and the slight attack of fever which called forth his landlord's sentiment and pity. Through the father he came to know the daughter, when the prying curiosity of his nature, his liking for secret influence and concealed action, together with the kind heart at bottom, and his real affection for the girl whose confidence he had partly forced and partly won, threw the whole secret into his hands and made him master of the situation — the keeper of the seal set against the writings whom no one suspected of complicity. This was exactly the kind of thing he liked, and the kind of thing that suited him, human mole, born detective and conspirator as he was.

When Leam met him in the wood on the evening of her confession to Edgar, she met him with the deliberate intention of confessing her fearful secret to him too, and of asking him to help her to escape, like the friend which he had promised he would be. She knew that it was impossible for her now to live at North Aston, and the sole desire she had was to be blotted out, as she had been.

There was no excitement about her, no feverish exaltation that would burn itself cold before twenty-four hours were over—only the dead dreariness of heart-break, the tenacious resolution of despair. She neither wept nor wrung her hands, but quiet, pale, rigid, she told her terrible story in the low and level tones in which a Greek Fate might have spoken, as sad and as immutable. She had sinned, and now had made such atonement as she could by confession—to her lover to save him from pollution, to her father to cancel his obligations to her, to her friend to be helped in her lifelong penance. This done, she had strengthened herself to bear all that might come to her with that resignation of remorse which demands no rights and inherits no joys. She was not one of those emotional half-hearted creatures who resolve one day, break down the next, and drift always. For good and evil alike she had the power to hold where she had gripped and to maintain what she had undertaken; and even her life at Windy Brow did not shake her.

And that life might well have shaken both a stronger mind and even a more resolute will than hers.

A square stone house of eight rooms, set on a bleak fell-side where the sun never shone, where no fruits ripened, no flowers bloomed and no trees grew, save here and there a dwarfed and twisted thorn covered with pale gray lichen and bent by the wind into painful deformity of growth—a house which had no garden, only a strip of rank, coarse grass before the windows, with a potato-patch and kail-yard to the side; where was no adornment within or without, no beauty of color, no softness of line, merely a rugged, lonesome, square stone tent set up on a mountain-spur, as it would seem for the express reception of tortured penitents not seeking to soften sorrow,—this was Windy Brow, the patrimony of the Gryces, where Keziah, Emmanuel's eldest sister, lived and had lived these sixty years and more.

The house stood alone. Monk Grange, the hamlet to which it geographically belonged — a place as bleak and bare as itself, and which seemed to have been flung against the fell-foot as if a bricklayer's hodman had pitched the hovels at haphazard anyhow — was two good miles away, and the market-town, to be got at only by crossing a dangerous moor, was nine miles off—as far as Sherrington from North Aston.

The few poor dwellers in Monk Grange had little to do with the market-town. They lived mostly on what they managed to raise and rear among themselves —holding braxy mutton good enough for feast-days, and oatmeal porridge all the year round the finest food for men and bairns alike. As for the gudewives' household necessaries, they were got by the carrier who passed once a fortnight on their road; and for the rest, if aught was wanting more than that which they

had, they did without, and, according to the local saying, "want was t' master."

Society of a cultured kind there was none. The clergyman was an old man little if it all superior to the flock to which he ministered. He was a St. Bees man, the son of a handloom weaver, speaking broad Cumberland and hopelessly "dished" by a hard word in the Bible. He was fond of his glass, and was to be found every day of his life from three to nine at the Blucher, smoking a clay pipe and drinking rum and milk. He had never married, but he was by no means an ascetic in his morals, as more than one buxom wench in his parish had proved; and in all respects he was an anachronism, the like of which is rare now among the fells and dales, though at one time it was the normal type for the clergy of the remoter North Country districts.

This old sinner—Priest Wilson as he was called—and Miss Gryce of Windy Brow represented the wealth and intellect of a place which was at the back of everything, out of the highway of life and untouched by the progress of history or science. And the one was not very much superior to the other save in moral cleanliness; which, however, counts for something.

If North Aston had said with a sniff that Mr. Gryce was not thoroughbred, what would have been its verdict on Sister Keziah? He at least had rubbed off some of the native fell-side mould by rolling about foreign parts, gathering experience if not moss, and becoming rich in knowledge if not in guineas; but Keziah, who had spent the last twenty years of her life in close attendance on a paralytic old mother, had stiffened as she stood, and the local mould encrusting her was very thick. Nevertheless, she too had a good heart if a rough hand, and, though eccentric almost to insanity, as one so often finds with people living out of the line and influence of public opinion, yet was as sound at the core as she was rude and odd in the husk.

She was a small woman, lean, wrinkled, and with a curious mixture of primness and slovenliness in her dress. She wore a false front, which she called a topknot, the small, crimped, deep-brown mohair curls of which were bound about her forehead with a bit of black velvet ribbon, while gray hairs straggled from underneath to make the patent sham more transparent still; and over her topknot she wore a rusty black cap that enclosed the keen monkeyish face like a ruff. Her every-day gown was one of coarse brown camlet, any number of years old, darned and patched till it was like a Joseph's coat; and the Rob Roy tartan shawl which she pinned across her bosom hid a state of dilapidation which even she did not care should be seen. She wore a black stuff apron full of fine tones from fruit-stains and fire-scorchings; and she took snuff.

She was reputed to be worth a mort of money, and she had saved a goodly sum. It would have been more had she had the courage to invest it; but she had a profound distrust of all financial speculations — had not Emmanuel lost his share by playing at knucklebones with it in the City?—and she was not the fool to follow my leader into the mire. For her part, she put her trust in teapots and stockings, with richer hoards wrapped in rags and sewn up in the mattress, and here a few odd pounds under the rice and there a few hidden in the coffee. That was her idea of a banking account, and she held it to be the best there was.

"Don't lend your hat," she used to say, "and then you'll not have to go bareheaded." And sometimes, talking of loans on securities, she would take a pinch of snuff and say she "reckoned nowt of that man who locked his own granary door and gave another man the key."

To all appearance, she lived only to scrape and hoard, moidering away her loveless life on the futile energies and sordid aims of a miser's wretched pleasures. But every now and then she had risen up out of the slough into which she had gradually sunk, and had done some grand things that marked her name with so many white stones. While she gloried in her skill in filching from the pig what would serve the chickens, in mak-

ing Jenny go short to save to-day's baking of havre-bread, in skimping Tim's bowl of porridge—his appetite being a burden on her estate which she often declared would break her—she had more than once given a hundred pounds at a blow to build a raft for a poor drowning wretch who must otherwise have sunk. In fact, she was one of those people who are small with the small things of life and great with the great—who will grudge a daily dole of a few threshed-out stalks of straw, but who sometimes, when rightly touched, will shower down with both hands full sheaves of golden grain. That is, she had mean aims, a bad temper, no imagination, but the capacity for pity and generosity on occasions.

Above all things, she hated to be put out of the way or intruded on. When her brother Emmanuel came down on her without a word of warning, bringing a girl with eyes that, as she said, made her feel foolish to look at, and a manner part scared, part stony, and wholly unconformable, telling her to keep this precious-bit madam like a bale of goods till called for, and to do the best with it she could, she was justified, she said, in splurging against his thoughtlessness and want of consideration, taking a body like that all of a heap, without With your leave or By your leave, or giving one a chance of saying Yes I will, or No I won't.

But though she splurged she gave way; and after she had fumed and fussed, heckled the maid and harried the man, said she didn't see as how she could, and she didn't think as how she would, sworn there was no bedding fit to use, and that she had no place for the things—apples and onions chiefly—that were in the spare room if she gave it up for the young lass's use, she seemed to quiet down, and going over to Leam, standing mutely by the black-boarded fireplace, put on her spectacles, peered up into her face, and said in shrill tones, rasping as a saw, though she meant to be kind, "Ah, well! I suppose it must be; so go your ways up stairs with Jenny, bairn, and make yourself at home. It's little I have for a fine young miss like you to play with, but what I have you're welcome to; so make no bones about it: d'ye hear?"

"But I am in your way," said Leam, not moving. "You do not want me?"

Miss Gryce laughed. "Want ye?" she shouted. "Want ye, do you say? Nay, nay, honey, it was no wanting of you or your marras that would ever have given me a headache, I'll ensure ye. But now that you are here you can bide as long as you've a mind; and you're welcome kindly. And Emmanuel there knows that my word is as good as my bond, and what I say I mean."

"Am I to stay?" asked Leam, turning to Mr. Gryce with a certain forced humility which showed how much it cost her to submit.

"Yes," he answered, less cheerfully and more authoritatively than was his manner at North Aston, speaking without a lisp and with a full Cumberland accent. "It is the best thing I can do for you—all I have to offer."

To which Leam bent her sad head with pathetic patience—pathetic indeed to those who knew the proud spirit that it reported broken and humbled for ever. Following the red-armed, touzled, ragged maid to the dingy cabin that was to be her room, she left her friend to explain to his sister, so far as he chose and could, the necessity under which he found himself of leaving his adopted daughter, Leonora Darley, in her care for a week or two, until such time as he should return and claim her.

"Your adopted daughter? God bless my soul, man! but you are the daftest donnet I ever saw on two legs!" cried Keziah, snatching up the coarse gray knitting which was the sole unanchored circumstance in the room and casting off her heel viciously. "What call had you to adopt a daughter—you with never a wife to mother her nor a house of your own to take her to? For I reckon nowt of your furnished houses here and your beggarly apartments there, as you know. And now you can do nothing better than bring her here to fash the life out of me before the week's over! But that's always the way with you men. You talk precious big, but it's mighty little you put

"'WELL, WELL, YOU'RE A GOOD BODY.'"

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your hands to; and when you hack out yokes for which you get a deal of praise, you take care not to bear them on your own backs. It's us women who have to do that."

"One would have supposed you would have liked a pretty young thing like that in the house. You are lonesome enough here, and it makes a little life," said Emmanuel quietly.

He knew his sister Keziah, and that she must have her head when the talking fit was on her.

"'A pretty young thing like that!'" she repeated scornfully. "Lord love you, born cuddy as you are! What's her good looks to me, I wonder, but a pound spent on a looking-glass, and Jenny taken off her work to make cakes and buttersops for her dainty teeth? We'll have all the men-folk too havering round to see which of 'em may have the honor of ruining himself for my fine lady. And I'll not have it, I tell ye. I'll not have my house turned into a fair, with madam there as the show. Life! what do I want with 'life' about me, or you either, Emmanuel? I've got my right foot in the grave, and I reckon yours is not far off; and what we've both got to do now is to see that we make a good ending for our souls."

"At all events, you don't refuse to take her for a week or two?" asked Emmanuel innocently.

"Did I say I refused? Did I send her up stairs as the nighest road to the street-door?" retorted his sister with disdain. "Did I not tell you, as plain as tongue could speak, that she is welcome to her bit and sup, and I'll pass the time away for her in the best way I can, though bad is the best, I reckon?"

"Well, well, you are a good body," said her brother.

"Ay," she answered, "I am good enough when I jump your way. But tell me, Emmanuel," changing from the disdain of the superior creature holding forth on high matters to the inferior to the familiar gossip of the natural woman, "what's to do with her? It's as plain as a pike-staff that something is troubling her, and maybe it will be some of your love nonsense? for it's mainly that as fashes the lasses. Good Lord! I'm thankful I was never hindered that way."

"Yes," said Mr. Gryce, "she has had what you women call a disappointment; and," speaking with unusual energy, "the man was a fool and a coward, and she has had a lucky escape."

"Say ye? If so, then there is no call for her to carry on," said Keziah philosophically. "But the poor bairn's looking wantle enough now, though I warrant me the fell-side air will brisk her up in no time."

"I hope it will," said her brother.

"What does she eat, now? You see, now I've got the lass on my hands, I cannot hunger her," said Keziah. "Not that I can give her dainties and messes," she added hastily, the miser's cloak suddenly covering the woman's heart. "She'll have to take what we get, and be thankful for her meat. Still, it's as well to know what a body's been accustomed to when they come like this, all of a heap."

"Don't fash yourself about her," answered Emmanuel. "Do what you can —that you will, I know—but leave her to herself: that's the way for her. She's an odd little body, and the least said the soonest mended with Leam."

"With who, d'ye say?" asked Keziah sharply.

"Lean — Leonora," said Emmanuel cherubically.

"Well, I wouldn't call a daughter of mine after old Pharaoh's kine," snapped Keziah with supreme scorn; and at that moment Leam came into the room, and Keziah bustled out of it to tig after Jenny and ding at Tim, as these two faithful servitors were wont to express the way of their mistress toward them.

"My dear, I did not know that things were so miserable here for you, but you must just bide here till the scent grows cold, and then I'll come for you and put you where you'll be better off," said Mr. Gryce kindly when he was alone with Leam.

"This will do," said Leam, suppressing a shudder as she looked round the little room, where what had originally

been a rhubarb-colored paper—chosen because it was a good wearing color—was patched here and there with scraps of newspapers or bits of other patterned papers; where the huge family Bible and a few musty and torn odd volumes of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* comprised the sole library; and where the only ornaments on the chimneypiece were three or four bits of lead ore from the Roughton Gill mines, above Caldbeck.

"You have been used to something far different," said Emmanuel, compassionately.

"My past is over," she answered in a low voice.

"But you'll come to a better future," he cried, his mild blue eyes watery and red.

"Shall I? When I die?" was her reply as she passed her hand wearily over her forehead, and wished—ah, how ardently!—that the question might answer itself now at once.

But the young live against their will, and Leam, though bruised and broken, had still the grand vitality of youth to support her. Of the stuff of which in a good cause martyrs, in a bad criminals, are made, she accepted her position at Windy Brow with the very heroism of resignation. She never complained, though every circumstance, every condition, was simply torture; and so soon as she saw what she was expected to do, she did it without remonstrance or reluctance. Her life there was like a lesson in a foreign language which she had undertaken to learn by heart, and she gave herself to her task loyally. But it was suffering beyond even what Emmanuel Gryce supposed or Keziah ever dreamed of. She, with the sun of the South in her veins, her dreams of pomegranates and orange-groves, of music and color and bright blue skies, of women as beautiful as mamma, of that one man—not of the South, but fit to have been the godlike son of Spain—suddenly translated from soft and leafy North Aston to a bleak fell-side in the most desolate corner of Cumberland—where for lush hedges were cold, grim gray stone walls, and the sole flowers to be seen gorse which she could not gather, and heather which had no perfume—to a house set so far under the shadow that it saw the sun only for three months in the year, and where her sole companion was old Keziah Gryce, ill-favored in person, rough of mood if true of soul, or creatures even worse than herself;—she, with that tenacious loyalty, that pride and concentrated passion, that dry reserve and want of general benevolence characteristic of her, to be suddenly cast among uncouth strangers whose ways she must adopt, and who were physically loathsome to her; dead to the only man she loved, his love for her killed by her own hand, herself by her own confession accursed; and to bear it all in silent patience,—was it not heroic? Had she been more plastic than she was, the effort would not have been so great. Being what she was, it was grand; and made as it was for penitence, it had in it the essential spirit of saintliness. For saintliness comes in small things as well as great, and George Herbert's swept room is a true image. There was saintliness in the docility with which she rose at six and went to bed at nine; saintliness in the quiet asceticism with which she ate porridge for breakfast and porridge for supper—at the first honestly believing it either a joke or an insult, and that they had given her pigs' food to try her temper; saintliness in the silence with which she accepted her dinners, maybe a piece of fried bacon and potatoes, or a huge mess of apple-pudding on washing-days, or a plate of poached eggs cooked in a pan not over clean; saintliness in the enforced attention which she gave to Keziah's rambling stories of her pigs and her chickens, her mother's ailments, Jenny's shortcomings in the matter of sweepings and savings, Tim's wastefulness in the garden over the kailrunts, and the hardships of life on a lone woman left with only a huzzy to look after her; saintliness in the repression of that proud, fastidious self to which Keziah's familiarity and snuff, Jenny's familiarity and disorder, the smell of the peat—which was the only fuel they burnt—reeking through the

house, and the utter ugliness and barren discomfort of everything about, were hourly miseries which she would once have repudiated with her most cutting scorn; saintliness in the repression of that self indeed at all four corners, and the resolute submission to her burden because it was her fitting punishment.

So the sad days wore on, and the fell-side air had not yet brisked up Emmanuel's adopted daughter as his sister prophesied. Indeed, she seemed slighter and paler than ever, and if possible more submissive to her lot and more taciturn. And as her intense quietude of bearing suited Miss Gryce, who could not bear to be fussed, and time proved her douce and not fashious, she became quite a favorite with her rough-grained hostess, who wondered more and more where Emmanuel had picked her up, and whose bairn she really was.

Her only pleasure was in wandering over the fells, whence she could see the tops of the Derwentwater mountains, and from some points a glimpse of blue Bassanthwaite flowing out into the open; where mountain-tarns, lying like silver plates in the purple distance, were her magic shows, seen only in certain lights, and more often lost than found; whence she could look over the broad Carlisle plain and dream of that day on the North Aston moor when she first met Edgar Harrowby; and whence the glittering strip of the Solway against the horizon made her yearn to be in one of the ships which she could dimly discern passing up and down, so that she might leave England for ever and lay down the burden of her life and her sorrow in mamma's dear land.

So the hours passed, dreary as Mariana's, and hopeless as those wherein we stand round the grave and know that the end of all things has come. And while North Aston wondered, and Alick mourned, and Edgar repented of his past folly with his handsome head in Adelaide's lap, Leam Dundas moved slowly through the shadow to the light, and from her chastisement gathered that sweet grace of patience which redeemed her soul and raised her from sin to sanctity.

CHAPTER XL.

LOST AND NOW FOUND.

IN bringing up Alick tied tight to her apron-strings, feeding him on moral pap, putting his mind into petticoats, and seeking to make him more of a woman than a man, Mrs. Corfield had defeated her design and destroyed her own influence. During his early growth the boy had yielded to her without revolt, because he was more modest than self-assertive—had no solid point of resistance and no definite purpose for which to resist; but after his college career he developed on an independent line, and his soul escaped altogether from his mother's hold. Had she let him ripen into manhood in the freedom of natural development, she would have been his chosen friend and confidante to the end: having invaded the most secret chambers of his mind, and sought to mould every thought according to the pattern which she held best, when the reaction set in the pendulum swung back in proportion to its first beat; and as a protest against his former thraldom he now made her a stranger to his inner life and shut her out inexorably from the holy place of his sorrow.

The mother felt her son's mind slipping from her, but what could she do? Who can set time backward or reanimate the dead? Day by day found him more silent and more suffering, the poor little woman nearly as miserable as himself. But the name of Leam, standing as the spectre between them, was never mentioned after Mrs. Corfield's first outburst of indignation at her flight—indignation not because she was really angry with Leam, but because Alick was unhappy.

After Alick's stern rejoinder, "Mother, the next time you speak ill of Leam Dundas I will leave your house for ever," the subject dropped by mutual consent, but it was none the less a living barrier between them because raised and maintained in silence.

"Oh, these girls! these wicked girls!" Mrs. Corfield had said with a mother's irrational anger when speaking of the circumstance to her husband. "We bring up our boys only for them to take

from us. As soon as they begin to be some kind of comfort and to repay the anxiety of their early days, then a wretched little huzzy steps in and makes one's life in vain."

"Just so, my dear," said Dr. Corfield quietly. "These were the identical words which my mother said to me when I told her I was going to marry you."

"Your mother never liked me, and I did like Leam," said Mrs. Corfield tartly.

"As Leam Dundas, maybe; but as Leam the wife of your son, I doubt it."

"If Alick had liked it—" said Mrs. Corfield, half in tears.

"You would have been jealous," returned her husband. "No: all girls are only daughters of Heth to the mothers of Jacobs, and I never knew one whom a mother thought good enough for her boy."

"You need not discredit your own flesh and blood for a stranger," cried Mrs. Corfield crossly; and the mute man with an aggravating smile suddenly seemed to repent of his unusual loquacity, and gradually subsided into himself and his calculations, from which he was so rarely aroused.

Alick, ceasing to make a confidante of his mother, began to make a friend of Mr. Gryce. Perhaps it ought rather to be said that Mr. Gryce began to make a friend of him. The old philosopher, with that corkscrew mind of his, knew well enough what was amiss with the poor lank-visaged curate. Being of the order of the benevolent busybodies fond of playing Providence, how mole-like soever his method, he had marked out a little plan of his own by which he thought he could make all the crooked roads run straight and discord flow into harmony. But he too fell into the mistake common to busybodies, benevolent and otherwise —treating souls as if they were machines to be wound up and kept going by the clockwork of an extraneous will and neatly manipulated by well-arranged circumstance.

One day he joined Alick in his walk to an outlying cottage of the parish, where the husband was sick and the wife and children short of food, and the Church sent its prayer-book and ministers as the best substitute it knew for a wholesome dwelling and sufficient wages. Theology was not much in the way of an old heathen who reduced all religions save Mohammedanism to the transmuted presentation of the archaic solar myth, and who thought Buddhism far ahead of every other creed; but he liked the man Alick, if the parson bored him, and he was caressing a plan which he had in his pocket.

"You find your life here satisfying, I suppose?" he began, his blue eyes looking into the wayside banks for creatures.

"Is any life?" answered Alick, his eyes turned to the vague distance.

"Not fully: the spirit of progress, working by discontent, forbids the social stagnation of rest and thankfulness; but we can come to something that suffices for our daily wants if it does not satisfy all our longings. Work in harmony with our nature, and doing good here and there when we can, both these help us on. But the work must be harmonious and the good we do manifest."

"So far as that goes, Church-work is pleasant to me—all, indeed, I care for or am fit for; but North Aston is stony ground," said Alick.

"Can you wonder? When the husbandman-in-chief is such a man as Mr. Birkett, you must make your account with stones and weeds. The spiritual cannot flourish under the hand of the unspiritual; and, considering the pastor, the flock is far from bad."

"That may be, but we do not like to live only in comparatives," said Alick. "I confess I should be happier in a cure where I was more of one mind with my rector than I am here, and not decried or ridiculed on account of every scheme for good that I might propose. Parish-work here is shamefully neglected, but Mr. Birkett will not let me do anything to mend it."

"Ah!" said Mr. Gryce, catching a luckless curculio by the way, "that is bad. A more harmonious one would certainly be, as you say, far more agreeable. Or a little parish of your own—a parish, however small, which would be

all your own, and you not under the control of any one below your diocesan? How would that do? That would be my affair if I were in the Church."

Alick's face lightened. "Yes," he said, "that is my dream—at least one of them. I would not care how small the place might be, if I had supreme control and might work unhindered in my own way."

"It will come," said Mr. Gryce cheerily. "All things come in time to him who knows how to wait."

"Ah, if I could believe that!" sighed Alick, thinking of Leam.

"Take my word for it," returned Mr. Gryce. "It will do you no harm to have a dash of rose-color in your rather sombre life; and Hope, if it tells flattering tales, does not always tell untrue ones."

"I fear my hope has flattered me untruly," said Alick, his faithful heart still on Leam.

Mr. Gryce captured a caterpillar wandering across the road. "Conduct is fate," he said. "If this poor fellow had not been troubled with a fit of restlessness, but had been content to lie safely hidden among the grass-roots where he was born, he would not have been caught. Yes, conduct is fate for a captive caterpillar as well as for man."

"And yet who can foresee?" said Alick. "We all walk in the dark blindfold."

"As you say, who can foresee? That makes perhaps the hardship of it, but it does not alter the fact. Blindly walking or with our eyes wide open, our steps determine our destiny, and our goal is reached by our own endeavors. We ourselves are the artificers of our lives, and mould them according to our own pattern."

"But that part of our lives which is under the influence of another? How can we manipulate that?" said Alick. "Love and loss are twin powers which create or crush without our co-operation."

"I only know one irreparable manner of loss—that by death," said Mr. Gryce steadfastly. "For all others while there is life there is hope, and I hold nothing beyond the power of the will to remedy."

"I wish I could believe that," Alick sighed again; and again Mr. Gryce said cheerily, "Then take that too on trust, and believe me if you do not believe in your own inborn elasticity, your own power of doing and undoing."

"There are some things which can never come right when they have once gone wrong," said Alick.

"You think so? I know very few," his companion answered in the hearty, inspiriting manner which he had used all through the interview, talking with a broader accent and lisping less than usual, looking altogether more manly and less cherubic than his wont. "I am a believer myself in the power of the will and holding on." After a pause he added suddenly, "You would be really glad of a small living, no matter where situated, nor how desolate and unimportant, where you would be sole master?"

"Yes," said Alick. "If I could win over one soul to the higher life, I should count myself repaid for all my exertions. We must all have our small beginnings."

"I am an odd old fellow, as you know, Mr. Corfield," laughed Emmanuel Gryce. "Give me your hand: I can sometimes see a good deal of the future in the hand."

Alick blushed and looked awkward, but he gave his bony, ill-shaped hand all the same.

After a little while, during which Mr. Gryce had bent this finger this way and that finger another way, had counted the lines made by the bended wrist, and had talked half to himself of the line of Jupiter and the line of Saturn, the line of life and that of Venus, he said quietly, "You will have your wish, and soon. I see a most important change of residence at about this time, which in conjunction with this," pointing to a small cross at the root of the fourth finger, "will be certainly to your advantage."

"How strange!" said Alick. "One scarcely knows whether to laugh at it all as old wives' fables or to believe in the mysterious forewarnings of fate, the foremarkings of the future."

"There are more things in heaven and earth—" said Mr. Gryce. "And we know so little we may well believe a trifle more."

The fact was, all this was founded on

these circumstances: He had at this moment a letter in his pocket from his sister Keziah telling him that old Priest Wilson had been found dead in his bed last night; the bishop's chaplain was a friend of his, both having been at the same station in India; and the perpetual curacy of Monk Grange was one which, if offices went according to their ratio of unpleasantness, a man should have been paid a large income to take. Hence there was no chance of a rush for the preferment, and the bishop would be grateful for any intimation of a willing martyr. Through all of which chinks whereby to discover the future Mr. Gryce founded his prophecy; and through them, too, it came about that he proved a true prophet. In three days' time from this the post brought a letter to Alick Corfield from the bishop offering him the perpetual curacy of Monk Grange, income seventy pounds a year and a house.

Before speaking even to his mother, Alick rushed off with this letter to Mr. Gryce. The old leaven of superstition which works more or less in all of us—even those few who think proof a desirable basis for belief, and who require an examination conducted on scientific principles before they accept supernaturalism as "only another law coming in to modify those already known"—that superstition which belongs to most men, and to Alick with the rest, made this letter a matter of tremendous excitement to him. He saw in it the hand of God and the finger of Fate. It was impossible that Mr. Gryce, living at North Aston, should know anything of a small country incumbency in the North. It was all that study made of his poor parched and knuckly hand. And what had been seen there was manifestly the thing ruled for him by Providence and destiny.

"How could you possibly tell?" he cried, looking at his own hand as if he could read it as his clever friend had done.

"That is my secret," said Emmanuel, smiling at the credulity on which he traded. Then, thinking a flutter outward of the corners of his cards the best policy in the circumstances about them at the moment, he added, "And when you get there you will understand more than you do now. For you will go?"

"Surely," said Alick: "it would be unfaithful in me to refuse."

"But see if you cannot make arrangements to take the place on trial for a few months. I know very little of your ecclesiastical law, but grant even that it is as devoid of common sense as I should suppose—seeing who are the men who make, administer and obey it—still, I should think that a temporary incumbency might be arranged."

"I should think so, and I will take your advice," said Alick, over whom Emmanuel Gryce was fast establishing the power which belongs to the stronger over the weaker, to the more astute over the more dense.

"You will find an adopted daughter of mine in the neighborhood," then said Mr. Gryce with the most amiable indifference. "She lives with my sister at our old home on the fell-side: Windy Brow the place is called. You must tell me how she looks and what you think of her altogether when you write to me, as I suppose you will do, or when you come home, if you elect not to take the cure even on trial."

"I am not much in the way of criticising young ladies," said Alick sadly.

"She is rather a remarkable girl, all things considered," returned Mr. Gryce quietly. "Her name is Leonora Darley. You will remember—Leonora Darley. Ask for her when you go up to Windy Brow: Leonora Darley," for the third time.

"All right: Miss Leonora Darley," repeated Alick, suspecting nothing; and again Mr. Gryce smiled as he dug his fingers into the earth of a chrysalis-box. How pleasant it was to pull the strings and see his puppets dance!

Of course, Mr. Birkett's consent was a necessary preliminary to Alick's departure, but there was no difficulty about it. The military rector was tired to death, so he used to say, of his zealous young aide-de-camp, and hailed the prospect of getting rid of him handsomely with a frank pleasure not flattering to poor

Alick's self-love. "Certainly, my dear boy, certainly," he said. "It will be better for you to have a place of your own, where you can carry out your new ideas. You see I am an old man now, and have learnt the value of letting well alone. You are in all the fever-time of zeal, and believe that vice and ignorance are like the walls of Jericho, to fall down when you blow your trump. I do not. But on the whole, it is as well that you should learn the realities of life for yourself, and carry your energies where they may be useful."

"Then you do not mind?" asked Alick boyishly.

The rector gave a loud clear laugh. "Mind! a thousand times no," he said, rubbing his plump white hands. "I can manage well enough alone, and if I cannot there are dozens of young eligibles ready to jump at the place. Mind! no. Go in Heaven's name, and may you be blessed in your undertaking!"

The last words came in as grace-lines, and with them Alick felt himself dismissed.

If the rector had been facile to deal with, Mrs. Corfield was not. When she heard of the proposed arrangement, and that she was to lose her boy for the second time out of her daily life, and more permanently than before, her grief was as intense as if she had been told of his approaching death. She wept bitterly, and even bent herself to entreaty; but Alick, to whom North Aston had become a dungeon of pain since Leam went, held pertinaciously to his plan — not without sorrow, but surely without yielding. He was fascinated by the idea of a cure where he might be sole master, not checked by rectorial ridicule when he wished to establish night schools or clothing clubs, penny savings banks, or any other of the schemes in vogue for the good of the poor; thinking too, not unwisely, that the best heal-all for his sorrow was to be found in change of scene and more arduous work together. Also, he thought that if his vague tentative advertisements in the papers, which he dared not make too evident, had as yet brought nothing, some more satisfactory way of discovering Leam's hiding-place might shape itself when he was alone, freer to act as he thought best. On all of which accounts he resisted his mother's grief, and his own at seeing her grieve, and decided on going down to Monk Grange the next day.

Had not Dr. Corfield been ailing at this time, the mother would have accompanied her son. The possibility of damp sheets weighed heavy on her mind; and landladies who filch from the tea-caddy, with landladies' girls, pert and familiar, preparing insidious gruel and seductive cups of coffee, were the lions which her imagination conjured up as prowling for her Alick through the fastnesses of Monk Grange. Circumstances, however, were stronger than her desire; and, happily for Alick, she was perforce obliged to remain at home while her darling went out from the paternal nest to shake those limp wings of his, and bear himself up unassisted in a new atmosphere in the best way he could.

It was on the cold and rainy evening of a cold and rainy summer's day that Alick arrived at Monk Grange—an evening without a sunset or a moon, stars or a landscape; painful, mournful, as those who dwell in the North Country know only too well as the tears on its face of beauty. He had driven in a crazy old gig from Wigton, and the nine miles which lay between that not too brilliant town and the desolate fell-side hamlet which he had been so fain to make his own spiritual domain had not been such as disposed him to a cheerful view of things. The rain had fallen in a steady, pitiless downpour, which seemed to soak through every outer covering and to penetrate the very flesh and marrow of the tired traveler as it pattered noisily on the umbrella and streamed over the leather apron; and the splash of the horse's hoofs through the liquid mud and broad tracts of standing water was as dreary as the "splash, splash" of Bürger's ballad. And when all this was over, and they drew up at the Blucher, with its handful of desolate gray hovels round it, the heart of the man sank at the gloomy surroundings into the midst of which he had flung

himself. But the zeal of the churchman was as good a tonic for him as the best common sense, and he waited until to-morrow and broad daylight before he allowed himself to even acknowledge an impression. The warm fireside at the Blucher cheered him too, and his supper of eggs and bacon and fresh crisp havre-bread satisfied such of his physical cravings as, unsatisfied, make a man's spiritual perceptions very gaunt.

He went to bed, slept, and the next day woke up to a glory of sun and sky, a brilliancy of coloring, a photographic sharpness and clearness of form, a suggestion of beauty beyond that which was seen, which transformed the place as if an angel had passed through it in the night. As he tramped about the sordid hamlet he forgot the rude uncouthness of men and place for a kind of ecstasy at the loveliness about him. Every jutting rock of granite shone in the sun like polished jasper, and the numberless little rills trickling down the fell-sides were as threads of silver, now concealed in the gold of the gorse, and now whitening the purple of the heather. The air was full of blithesome sounds. Overhead the skylarks sang in jocund rivalry, mounting higher and higher as if they would have beaten their wings against the sun: the bees made the heather and the thyme musical as they flew from flower to flower, and the tinkling of the running rills was like the symphony to a changeful theme. It was in real truth a transformation, and the new-comer into the fitful, seductive, disappointing North felt all its beauty, all its meaning, and gave himself up to his delight as if such a day as yesterday had never been.

After he had done what he wished to do in the village, he went up the fell-side road to Windy Brow, and, obeying his instructions, asked when he got there "if Miss Leonora Darley was at home."

"Na, she bain't," said Jenny, eying poor innocent Alick as a colley might eye a wolf sniffing about the fold. "T' auld mistress is."

"Say Mr. Corfield, please," said Alick; and Jenny, telling him to "gang intilt parlor," scuffled off to Keziah, pottering over some pickled red cabbage, which made the house smell like a vinegar-cask.

"I've heard tell of you," said Miss Gryce as she came in wiping her hands on a serviceable and by no means luxurious cloth: "Emmanuel wrote me a letter about you. You're kindly welcome to Monk Grange, but you're only a haverel to look at. Take a seat, and tell me—how's Emmanuel, my brother?"

"He was well when I saw him the day before yesterday: at least he said nothing to the contrary," answered Alick with his conscientious literalness.

"I like that," said Keziah. also eying him, but as a colley might have eyed a strange sheep, not a wolf. "A random rory would have made no difference between now and two days back, and believing and being. You cannot be overparticular in the truth, I take it."

Alick blushed, shifted his place and looked uneasy. And again, as so often before, it came across him: had he done right, judged by the highest law, to conceal the truth as he knew it about Leam?

"Hoot, man! there's no call for you to sit on pins and needles in that fashion," said Keziah. "It's a daft body that cannot hear a word of praise without turning as red as a turkey-cock and fidging like a parched pea on a drumhead. I've not turned much of you over yet, and maybe I'll come to what I'll have no mind to praise; so keep your fidges till you are touched up with the other end of the stick. And so you are to be our new priest, are you?"

"I am going to offer myself for a time," said Alick.

"For a time? That's a thing as has two sides to it. If you are not to our minds, that's its good side: if you are, and we are not to yours, that's its bad. I doubt if our folk will care to be played Jumping Joan with in that fashion."

"I will be guided by the will of the Lord," said Alick reverently.

"Humph! I like the words better nor the chances in them," returned Keziah, taking a pinch of snuff. "But maybe things 'll work round as one would have them; and whether you stay or you do

not, the Lord's will be done, amen! and His grace follow you, young man!"

"Thank you," said Alick with emotion, getting up and shaking the pickle-stained and snuff-discolored hand.

"I have a message for Miss Leonora Darley," he then said after a pause. "Mr. Gryce told me I was to be sure and tell him how she was looking."

"Eh, poor bairn! she is not very first-rate," the old woman answered tenderly. At least it was tenderness in her: in another person her voice and manner might have been taken for crabbedness and impatience. "She's up by there, on the fell somewhere. She a'most lives on the fell-side, but it don't make her look as brisk as I should like. Have you seen the view from our brow-top? It is a real bonny one; and you'll maybe find Leonora not far off. I don't think she wanders far."

"I should like to see it," said Alick. "The country altogether looks splendid to-day."

"Ay, it's a bonny day enough if it would but last. Come your ways with me and I'll set you out by the back door. You can come in again the same road if you've a mind."

On which she bustled up, and Alick, escorted by her, went through the house and on to the fell-side.

It was, if possible, grander now than it had been in the earlier part of the day. The hot sun had cleared away the lingering mist, and the cloudless sky was like one large perfect opal, while the earth beneath shone and glistened as if it were a jewel set with various-colored gems. There was not a mean or sordid thing about. Touched by the splendid alchemy of the sun, the smallest circumstance was noble, the poorest color glorious. Alick stood on the fell-brow entranced: then turning, he saw slowly coming across the pathless green a young slight figure dressed in gray. He looked as it came near, and his heart beat with a force that took all power from him. It was absurd, he knew, but there was such a strange look of Leam about that girl! He stood and watched her coming along with that slow, graceful, undulating step which was Leam's birthright. Was he mad? Was he dreaming? What was this mocking trick of eyesight that was perplexing him? Surely it was madness; and yet—no, it could be no one else. Supreme, beloved, who else could personate her so as to cheat him?

She came on, her eyes always fixed on the distance, seeing nothing of Alick standing dark against the sky. She came nearer, nearer, till he saw the glory of her eyes, the curve of her lip, and could count the curling tresses on her brow. Then he came down from the height and strode across the space between them.

She lifted up her eyes and saw him. For an instant the sadness cleared out of them as the mists had cleared from the sky: her pathetic mouth broke into a smile, and she held out both her hands. "Alick, dear Alick! my good Alick!" she cried in a voice of exquisite tenderness.

"My queen!" he said kneeling, his honest upturned face wet with tears. "Lost and now found!"

PART XI.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN HIS RIGHT MIND.

NOTHING is easier to a clever woman than to catch a heart at the rebound. Samson, wounded and sorrowful, lays his weary head in the lap of that watchful Delilah who has been biding her time, knowing that it would come, and when he wakes up again he finds his locks shorn, and his strength, with his freedom, gone. Then it is too late. Sorrow, revolt, complaint,—all are of no avail. He has nothing for it but to accept the irremediable quietly and sleep on, determined to find his dreams pleasant and his pillow sweet, as some good, careless fellows do. Others, unfortunately for themselves, resent the mistake that they have made and the snare into which they have fallen, and cannot, do what they will, reconcile themselves to their disaster or refrain from shaking their chains dismally. Adelaide had been Edgar's Delilah, watchful, patient, respectable. She had bided her time and waited, and now she was reaping her reward. Samson had delivered himself into her hand, and she had bound him with fetters stronger than green withes. The decisive words had been spoken, the needful preliminaries arranged, and a few days now would see the great aim of her life fulfilled, and the crowning stone flung on the cairn of the delusive past. It was a proud moment for her; and all the more in that she owed her success mainly to her own tact and determination, for the very fitness of things which had helped to bring this marriage about had been the fitness which she herself had created.

There was to be no vulgar parade, no noisy rejoicing, at this wedding between the owner of the Hill and the rector's daughter; only simple arrangements of that solid magnificence and proud exclusiveness which are so dear to English county families, and which assort better with their condition than the more noisy demonstrations, the more showy finery, of the town-bred rich. Besides, though the marriage was one in every way satisfactory, judging by outside facts —the only measuring tape held by the world—it had its own secret history which did not agree with a very demonstrative ceremonial; and Adelaide was wise, though she was ambitious. She was content to have and to hold that which she had so long desired, without laying too much stress on the manner of assignment. To be installed mistress of the Hill and head of the society for ten miles round were the two clauses in the marriage lines which were to the real purpose. Whether she had one bridesmaid or a dozen, and whether her father gave a breakfast to ten guests or a hundred, were adventitious circumstances not affecting the central fact. And if we have that central fact set square and firm, who in his senses troubles himself about the fringe of adventitious circumstance? When we are buying a house we look to the beams and the walls, not to the Banksia roses up the porch or to the volute of the cornice.

The marriage between these two persons so manifestly made for each other had not been arranged in a dark corner, but neither had it been paraded in broad day or published at the market-cross. If there was no bond of secrecy to be kept, no blare of trumpets had been sounded. It was quietly announced now to one, now to another, as it might chance, and thus filtered noiselessly through the place and beyond till it came at last to Alick Corfield down at Monk Grange, doing his best to lift up Leam in her own esteem by his devotion, and to soften the intenser bitterness of her life by the unchanging sweetness of his love.

Here again his principles and his affection, his conscience and his heart, came into collision. Should he tell her of this

marriage? She ought to know, must know some day, but he shrank from the painful task of enlightening her. Good and true in soul as he was, he was weak where his affections were concerned. He had been bred on a wrong plan for the practice of sharp mental surgery, and though capable of suffering martyrdom on his own account, was incapable of giving pain to others, least of all to those whom he loved.

Wherefore he held his peace, and Leam was still ignorant of the fact that Edgar Harrowby was, as North Aston phrased it, in his right mind at last, and about to marry Adelaide Birkett, as he ought to have done when he first came home. Sufficient to the day, he thought. Leam's health had run down too much to make it advisable to give her any kind of shock, and it was best to let her present wounds heal before others were inflicted. Let her, then, rest in peace and blessed unconsciousness of the evil to come, till it could be no longer warded off. If he was doing wrong not to tell her, he would bear the burden on his own soul, as he had been content to bear that other, and would, had it been possible, have borne others even weightier.

Edgar had behaved very well: Adelaide had behaved very well. On all regarding Leam he had kept absolute silence, and she had respected that silence. He had not confessed that he had been the accepted lover of Leam Dundas for the space of two days and a half; and she, though she knew that something had happened between them, never inquired how much, nor yet what had been the circumstance which had sent Edgar to her broken-hearted on that Friday evening, and which, in all probability, had been the circumstance that had caused Leam's mysterious disappearance. In her heart she was curious enough. That was but natural: she would not have been a woman else. Outwardly, she was restrained and sensible, and let the mystery pass as a thing not interesting, because not concerning, her. But she often pondered on it in secret, and wearied herself in conjectures, not one of which was absolutely true, though the main thread of all was not far from the truth—Leam had done something shameful, and Edgar had found it out.

What that shameful thing was, and how Edgar had found it out, remained the double heart of the mystery which no conjecture could lay bare. It said something for Adelaide's strength of purpose that she could accept her ignorance on such a matter so quietly. Perhaps she looked through the coming years to the time when marriage had made her safe and she need not be so careful as now, when by coaxings at the right moment, and, if coaxings would not do, by reproaches, tears, untiring iterations, which, like constant droppings wearing down the granite, grind down into plasticity the hardest will at last, she would be able to force from the husband safely secured in the matrimonial fastnesses what it would be dangerous to even filch by a clever trick from the free-standing lover, with marriageable loopholes still before him. At all events, she refrained from questioning now, and Edgar was profoundly grateful to her for her sweet delicacy and sympathetic feeling.

For himself, his satisfaction in his marriage was of a rather grim kind. It was marriage and it was not love, which for a man whose line of life had hitherto run the reverse way seems hard to bear. It was all the difference between gray days and rosy ones; and to those used to roses, leaves gray and dead are poor substitutes. Still, the marriage had its confessed advantages, and he must be content to have saved so much out of the fire. On this broad philosophic basis, then, he built up his hopes for the future, and made no doubt that he should get on as well as his neighbors. And when he was meditating after dinner, well fed, resigned and soothed, he used to ask himself, Would Leam have been the right kind of wife for him, after all? If the Hill had been a South Sea island, and himself and Leam the only inmates, there would have been no doubt as to their fitness for each other; but he was Major Harrowby, a magistrate and a

gentleman, fettered by conventionalities of all kinds, not a dusky youth with a floral wardrobe and as few responsibilities as garments; and being this, perhaps—with a heavy sigh—Adelaide was the wiser bargain. She looked very pretty to-day, and talked very nicely, and he was glad she liked those *quenelles:* he liked women to have good taste.

All this was the right kind of thing for a woman of Adelaide's composed temperament and quiet habits. The tumultuous passion of an ardent lover would have embarrassed her, and the constant presence of an adoring one would have bored her; and she disliked to be embarrassed quite as much as she disliked to be bored. What she wanted was reasonableness, social success and decorum; and she had all in the exact proportions desired. Therewith she made herself content, and regretted nothing of that inner sweetness, that poetic fervor, which, not having, she did not miss, and which, had she had, she would not have understood.

When the morning came the village flocked to the church to see a wedding by no means so pretty as Josephine's, but infinitely more stately. It was the solid compressed weight of gold as compared with the fluffy bulk of feathers; and only fools like feathers better than gold. To be sure, certain circumstances were the same as before. There were the village children, for instance, but instead of the brilliant combination of scarlet and white and blue that had made such a pretty show in the early summer, their dresses now were a dull dark purple, as more serviceable in the coming winter. To be sure, too, they strewed flowers on the fair bride's path as she left the church, successful at last, but for the roses and jessamine, honeysuckle and fair Mary lilies that had been dear, comely Josephine's metaphorical way of walking, hollyhocks and dahlias, chrysanthemums and melancholy amaranths, were Adelaide's. The sisters of the bridegroom assisted again as before, but instead of the bright rose-color which composed so well and symbolized flowers, the silver gray in which the Misses Harrowby were dressed had a suggestion of mourning that was scarcely inspiriting for the occasion. No pretty girls—the one like a monthly rose, the other like a burning pomegranate bud—were there to eclipse by their beauty the faded homeliness of the elders; only the bride herself to show in solitary beauty amid so much that was less than fair. And even little Fina was but a spectator this time, not an official, and not so much caressed by Major Harrowby as before.

There was no ball in the evening; no fond wishes roused into activity because of the suggestiveness of that morning's ceremonies; no intoxicating revelations, no bewildering ecstasies to grow out of it. All was as cold and smooth as ice—the dresses, the breakfast, the speeches, the emotions: he was simply in his right mind, and she was Mrs. Harrowby of the Hill.

There was no rushing off, either, to Paris and a fatiguing continental tour as the best method of beginning married life and rubbing down the inevitable angles of awkwardness and difference. Edgar had not the heart to travel, and Adelaide had the true insular contempt for all things foreign and unknown. It was more to the taste of both to go to the lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland than to any overrated millpond of Como or Lucerne. September is a grand month for the North in general, and they were not yet more than halfway through; the early autumn tints of wood and mountain-side are even more enchanting than the tender greenery of the spring; and both argued in concert that every patriotic Briton ought to be acquainted with the choice bits of his native land before running after transmarine show-places. Hence they agreed, mutually consulting and consenting, that they would make a quiet little home-tour which would fulfill a duty, save fatigue and not keep them too long from home. But as the rank and file of hearers are mainly thick-witted, the report got about in North Aston that they were going to Scotland; and it was Scotland that Alick heard from his mother, and Scotland that Mr. Gryce

did not write to his sister. Had he known the truth, he would have given Alick a hint, and Leam would have been watched, lest by a miracle she had fallen into danger; for, after all, it would seem as if it must needs be a miracle that would bring her path and theirs to a common point of contact.

CHAPTER XLII.

MY QUEEN STILL.

HAD Leam been suspicious or egoistic, she would have seen that something unusual was pressing on Alick at this time. Always tender and respectful, his manner had had for the last few days a certain loving watchfulness of protection, a certain chivalrous devotion and knightly kind of reverence, which implied something hurtful from which to defend, something humiliating from which to shield her.

It would have given any one else cause for thought, but Leam, once so sensitive and intolerant, seemed now to be scarcely touched by anything from without. When she caught Alick's melancholy eyes fixed on her, full of tears, she only thought, "Poor Alick! how unhappy he is! That is my doing;" and when he hovered about her, treating her with as much deference as if she had been some saintly princess condescending to her vassal, she murmured, "How good he is to me! and I am so wicked!" But she did not look deeper, nor ask herself why this goodness was so specially active now.

And Alick was unhappy—as much for the change in Leam herself as for the grief that had to come to her when she should hear how soon the man whom she loved so faithfully had consoled himself and taken another to fill the place which was to have been hers. If she would but be more like herself, and not so pathetically patient, not so mournfully gentle! he thought tearfully. If only she would look at him with the old superb disdain, then turn away her eyes with the girlish scorn that had so often made him blush and writhe with pleased embarrassment, call him stupid, tell him he should not talk nonsense, that he knew nothing of what he was saying, and treat him with that grand manner of calm contempt, that exquisite assumption of superiority, which was the most delicious thing he had ever known, he would not be so unhappy. But now so patient, so humble, so sad. As a Christian he knew that he ought to rejoice to see the pride of her heart broken and the grace of humility and penitence in its stead; but as the boy who had grown into the man, worshiping, this spectacle of the discrowned queen with her purple in the dust and her sceptre fallen from her hand was one that nearly broke his heart to see.

His beloved young queen! If she had been faithful to her mother, so would he be to her; and how stained and soiled soever her royal robes, with her crown trodden under foot in the mire and her sceptre broken in her guilty hand, she should still be to him regal, reverenced, adored—his queen if discrowned, his saintly princess condescending to her vassal—no matter how much she had been humbled, how far abased by sin and its shadow, shame. When with him she should at least feel her best self, and that she was with one to whom she never could be aught but noble and beloved. If circumstance and conscience had humiliated her, the reverence of love, the fidelity of respect, should reinstate her; and never in his most adoring moments at the old home had Alick paid her the profound devotion that he paid her now.

One day they met on the fell as usual. They often met on the fell-side, for Alick, whose windows commanded Windy Brow, had learnt Leam's habits by heart, as Edgar Harrowby had done before him, and a good field-glass told him all that he wanted to know. This was the day of Edgar's marriage with Adelaide. It was just about this time, eleven o'clock, that the ceremony was being performed, and the vows, consecrated to Leam, passed on to her successor. But how little that beloved and discarded one knew what disloyalty to her memory was being enacted at this moment! and how ter-

rible it would be to her when she did know, as some day she must!

Alick watching her as she wandered slowly on before, he striding after her to overtake her—as he should before she had quite reached the fell-top—felt his heart burn with indignation against the man who could not find in his love enough grace for her sin, who would not share her crime by his own sacrifice of ideal purity. To him Leam, blood-stained and besmirched, was better than any one else clad in shining garments and accepted; and he hated Edgar Harrowby, not because he had been loved, but because he had not been brave enough to accept the conditions of that love; for, though Leam had told him nothing directly, he was sure that he knew all, and that she had fled from North Aston because, having confessed, Edgar had renounced.

He felt, too, as if he could not let her out of his sight to-day—as if he must be at hand to protect her should the blow by some bad miracle fall on her dear head. It seemed as if the very bracken on the fell would whisper to her what cruel thing was being done to her memory to-day, and as if he alone could help her, he alone protect her.

Presently she stopped and sat down on a jutting bit of rock. Once so fibrous, firm, well knit, now her strength was soon exhausted. She easily lost her breath; her heart had become more troublesome than ever was poor madame's; and the small arched feet that once gripped the ground like feet of steel now moved slowly and languidly, all their elasticity gone like the rest of her former power. Hence, she never got far from home now, and she was fain to walk so slowly, especially on an ascent, that Alick's long legs had no difficulty in overtaking her, how far soever her start might have been.

He soon drew up to her, and stood before her as she sat. "Are you well to-day?" he asked anxiously, looking down on her as he stood towering above her, honest and ungainly, his rugged face full of tenderness.

She was very white—white even to her lips—and looked, he thought, strangely wasted. The curling rings of dark hair, golden-edged, that came from beneath her hat were matted against her forehead with the treacherous damps of weakness, and the mournful eyes, far too large and bright, with their dilated pupils and look of fixed pain, were encircled by dark lines that made them look even larger and more mournful than before. Alick had thought her fearfully changed when he had first seen her on his arrival, but to-day she looked as if the bond between her and life had suddenly worn so slight it needed but a feather's touch to break it altogether.

"Well? Yes," she answered quietly. "Why do you ask?"

"I thought you looked a little ill—a little delicate," said Alick anxiously.

She drew a deep breath, checked at once by a sudden pain. "No," she said when the spasm passed, "I am not ill, but I am tired: I am always tired now."

"You ought to see a doctor. Why does not Miss Gryce send over to the town for one?" said Alick, looking vaguely into the distance.

"Why should she?" answered Leam. "It is nothing."

"It makes us all anxious to see you look so ill," he urged. "For our sakes you ought to take care of yourself, my dear, and see some one who would do you good."

She looked at him plaintively. "Who are 'us'?" she said. "I have no one now."

Tears filled Alick's eyes. Ah! it had been always thus: he was nothing, never had been anything, to her. He who had loved her best had harvested least.

"Am I no one?" he asked, with nothing of jealous pain, only with a hopeless kind of despondency that scarcely rose to the level of entreaty, still less of reproach. "You know what you are to me," lovingly.

She looked distressed, for a moment almost frightened.

"No, do not be afraid," he continued, answering her look. "I will not offend you, Leam. I love you too well to pain you by my own selfishness. I only want to help in your peace, your happiness."

"So you do," she answered kindly. "You are all I have now. I should be very unhappy without you."

"There is not much happiness for you here anyhow," he answered. "At the best, and wishing to do the best, who can be of any good to you? I am only an awkward kind of animal who would fight for you to the death, if need be, and protect you with my life, Leam, if it had to be done; but I am no one. And Miss Gryce is good in her own way, and means to do what is right, but her place is no place for you. You have nothing there you ought to have, and how terrible it is to see you suffer as you do in such a household!"

She raised her hand. "Hush!" she said gently: "I suffer only what I deserve." And again looking at him kindly, she repeated, "And I have you."

"I know I ought to be glad to hear you say so; and for myself, oh, you do not know, my dear, what pleasure it gives me—no, it is more than pleasure—to think that I can be of any use to you. But I cannot bear it, all the same," said Alick, his lips quivering. "It breaks my heart to see you so humble and so patient, grateful to *me!*—so unlike your old imperious self. If only you would scold me sometimes, and tell me I am absurd, and a stupid cold-blooded Englishman, and know nothing, as you used to do, I could bear your bitterest contempt better than this patience. It does not seem natural or good from you to me."

"I used to be imperious when I had the right," said Leam, "or thought I had. Now every one is better than I am. You always were, but others are now."

"No, no!" cried Alick vehemently. "No, Leam! Remember — you were such a child: God himself cannot be angry with you, such a mere child as you were."

"The thing is the same," she answered with a shudder.

"But if man sees the fact, God understands the circumstances," cried Alick. "And the infinite Mercy reaches to all and redeems all."

"Listen, Alick," said Leam suddenly, raising her head and speaking as one who intended to speak to the point. "I do not care to talk of myself, but I want to say something. When I went to school and they taught me, told me things I did not know, had not heard of —or, if I had, had disbelieved and despised—I began to see, after a time, that there was really something in the world besides mamma and Spain, and that mamma did not know everything, as I once thought. Then I began to think of what I had done. The older I grew the more I thought of it, and the more I saw it was wicked. I had not done it for wickedness, but it was, all the same. I thought I was doing right at the time: I only thought of mamma, and that I would protect her, and hinder her from being unhappy. When I came home I began to be most miserable of all. Everything reminded me; and I was so sorry for papa, and poor little Fina too. I had the thought of it always with me. I never lost it quite, though sometimes I did not think of it so clearly as at others. Sometimes I felt as if I must tell it to papa. I knew you knew, but I was ashamed to speak to you. I did not want to hear you say that you knew: I felt as if I could not have borne that."

"And yet you might have trusted me," said Alick in a low voice. "I respected you too much to give you pain."

"I knew that," she answered; "still, I did not want to have to humble myself to you. Then—" she stopped: a slight color came into her wan face and her eyes filled with tears, but she conquered her emotion and her reluctance, for this was a difficult passage to proud, reserved Leam, but she conquered herself as part of her penance, and went on—"then Major Harrowby was with me a good deal. You were ill, all the others were away, and I saw him nearly every day. I never thought of it when I was with him. I do not know why, but he seemed to rest me like sleep, and I never felt when with him that I had done such a dreadful crime. It went on like this till papa married. That evening he told me he loved me. And then, Alick, I knew that I loved him, and had loved him from the first without knowing it. Don't

let me cry, dear Alick—don't, please!" She broke off with a sudden sob, covering her face with her hands.

"No, Leam, you must not cry," said Alick, his own voice full of tears. "It will make you ill, dear: you must not. And nothing, no one, is worth one of your tears," he added vehemently, cursing Edgar in his heart with a passion that startled even himself.

After a few moments Leam lifted up her face again. Once more will had conquered weakness, and her eyes were dry. "You are so kind to me," she said a little faintly. "You must not think I do not feel it because I do not say much. But I want to tell you all. I was so happy then!" she went on to say, clasping her thin hands nervously in each other. "For just two days, Alick—two days out of my life, my whole life. I cannot tell you what those two days were to me. When I look back it seems as if it had been a sudden ending of incessant pain or coming into the light from the dark. It was like heaven, and I felt so innocent and free! Then there came that dreadful storm. Do you remember it? I was in my own room, and," shuddering, "one flash shot right over the Commandment table. It seemed to fall like a line of fire across *that* one: you know what I mean. Then I knew that I had been spoken to by some one from heaven, and made to understand that I was not fit to be his wife. I was a murderess. What an awful word! I had forgotten till now who and what I really was. Now I had to remember. For his own sake, and because I loved him, I must give him up. And I did. I told him the truth, and we parted."

"It was a cowardly shame," flashed Alick angrily: "he was not worthy of your love."

"No, no, don't say that," she answered. "It was right, quite right. He could not marry such a wretch as I am; and would I have degraded him so much, when I loved him as I do? He was quite wise and right to let me go. He loved me; I know he loved me, and I am sure he loves me still; he is too noble to change like the wind. He could not do that. Perhaps when I die, and I am made good in purgatory—fit for him, great and good as he is—we shall meet in heaven and not part again. I do not think I could go on living if I did not believe that. It is the only thing I ask of God and the saints—to make me good enough to live with him in heaven when we both die. And sometimes I feel as if God would be good and kind, and would listen to me and grant this to me."

She said this with a child's fervor and a child's simplicity, looking up to the sky with a prayer in her eyes that interpreted itself.

Alick did not speak. He felt suffocated, choked, by the bitter thought of how pitiably she was mistaken—by the knowledge that the love on which she had counted for all eternity had not lasted two short months—that to-day was Edgar's wedding-day, and while she spoke of living with him for ever he had forgotten her for Adelaide Birkett and the marriage which it was conventionally fitting and socially wise that he should make.

"I will tell you all now," Leam said after a pause. "After I had confessed to Major Harrowby, I felt as if I could not live at home any longer, and as if I did not care who knew. I went to Mr. Gryce: I met him in the wood where I had seen him go, and told him, too, everything. He helped me, as he had said he would one day, for he had found it out, I do not know how. He made me call myself Leonora Darley, and brought me here as his adopted daughter. I do not think anything hurt me more, after I lost *him*, than to deny mamma's name and call myself by a false one. It was like denying mamma."

"But it is safer if you do not want to be known," said Alick soothingly.

"Yes," she sighed, "it is safer, but it is horrid all the same. But I have no right to complain," she added hastily, as if to atone for the little flash of the old spirit that had broken out. "It is better too, as you say. No one knows me here, and no one at home knows where I am."

"Not your father?"

"No," she answered, her color rising.

"I wrote to papa and told him what I had done—told him everything, and that I would never trouble him again. As he took no pains to find me out, no one will. Sometimes I think, though, he, Major Harrowby, will want to find me. I seem to dream of it sometimes."

Alick shivered. "I hope not," he said in an altered voice.

"Better not," murmured Leam in a sad, heartbroken way.

"Better let me be the only one who knows where you are," he said earnestly. "You can trust me."

"And him too," said Leam, as she would have said it of her mother.

"I hope so, but I only know myself," answered Alick.

"Yes, I can trust him; and you too," she said with the sweetest little inclination of her head. "I know how good and true you are, Alick."

"Oh, if she could but have loved me!" thought poor Alick. "How I would have protected and cared for her—soothed her wounded spirit and raised her again in her own esteem! But she gave her love where it was not prized, and Adelaide Birkett is fitter for him than Leam." Which was the same, to his mind, as saying that to Edgar darkness was more beautiful than light, the winter a fairer season than the spring. Presently, answering his own thoughts, he said, in his honest, clumsy way, "But you will forget him in time, Leam: you cannot go on like this for ever. It will wear you out: you must forget him and everything else, and be yourself again."

She looked up at him in astonishment. "Forget Major Harrowby!" she repeated in a low distinct voice. "What are you saying? How could I forget him? Have I forgotten mamma? Why should I? He is the best and greatest man I have ever known. So noble! so true! I should die if I forgot him."

Alick groaned and turned away, and Leam looked at him for one instant in the superb way of olden days. Then her eyes softened and her face grew tender. She laid her hand on Alick's arm, and said with exquisite pathos, "Do not envy me the only joy I have. You are good to me—so good, my friend, my only one—but Edgar!" She hid her face in her hands, and Alick knelt down by her in a burst of anguish almost as bitter as her own.

After this there was no more talk, and a long silence fell between them. Leam indeed seemed to have exhausted herself. Silent, reserved and frail, her long speaking, so unusual and so uncongenial to her, had evidently tried her greatly. The strong September wind, too, blew sharp and keen, and now the excitement of her confession was over she became faint and cold. But she got up and drew one or two checked, half-sobbing breaths, looking round as if wakened up out of a sleep, and, shivering, said she would go home.

She tottered, however, as she tried to walk, and was forced to take Alick's arm to keep her from falling. Truly, she was strangely weak to-day. She wiped the clammy damps from her forehead and her lips, and said, in a half-pleasant, half-mournful tone, that she was ashamed to be so silly, and that she did not know what had come to her.

As Alick felt her slight hand on his arm, and when he had to stop and let her lean against him to recover breath and gain strength enough to go on, he felt sick at heart for fear, but oh how tender, how full of love! In her palmiest days he had never loved her as he did now, when, broken and humiliated, she dropped the last remnant of her pride, and to the full confession of her sin added also that of her weakness.

"How good you are!" she said again, as they were standing there on the fell, she leaning against his arm as if it had been the branch of a tree, the back of a chair, or any other merely inanimate method of support, he not only concealing, but conquering, all personality of his love that he might the better support, protect and assist her. "How kind and generous! I wonder you can bear with me at all."

"Surely," he remonstrated, "I am honored by you, Leam—honored that you let me be anything to you—your dog, your slave."

"Do not say that," she said. "You are pure and good, and I—" She shuddered.

"And you are my queen still," he answered. "Were you stained from head to heel with the soil of sin, you would always be the same to me, dear—always my flower, my poem, my lady supreme and before all others."

"Poor Alick!" she sighed; and then no more was said till they reached the gate of the desolate home which was all that crime and sorrow had left her.

At the gate she turned and said simply, "I love you very dearly. You know that, don't you? You are my good, faithful Alick—like my own brother. You do not think me ungrateful?"

"God bless you!" said Alick fervently. "Now I am rewarded. Some day perhaps it will come—when we are both old people, and you have forgotten all this pain—some day, when we are old."

She smiled faintly, not quite taking in his full meaning. She did not refuse his sketchy picture, destroy his vague hope, but she knew in her heart that her life of love and happiness was over, and that it was not to be restored to her on this side the grave. But she smiled because of the irradiance on the faithful face of the man who loved her, and when they parted she pressed his hand for the first time in her life, and said again, "Good Alick! dear friend! I do love you in my way. Don't you know that I do?"

"As your dog," he said, with the delighted gratitude of a dog, "and you are my queen, now and ever."

This was their manner of parting on the day of Edgar Harrowby's marriage with Adelaide Birkett at North Aston, just about the time when the health of the bride and bridegroom was proposed at the breakfast by Cyril Fairbairn.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE FELL-SIDE.

THE autumn this year at the Lakes was one of the finest that had been known for many seasons. The winds were still, the rain forgot to fall, but the ground was not parched nor vegetation withered, for each evening the sunset mists crept up from lake and river to hang in soft clouds and wreaths about the hillsides and along the low-lying meadows, returning to the earth the sweet freshness which they had taken from it. Through the day the skies were cloudless, opalescent, brilliant, like the skies of a new creation; the granite rocks and rugged mountain-tops stood out in clear air, bold in outline and with purple shadows firm and deep; the fells were full of color and the woods rich in autumnal tints: altogether, it was an ideal time for the Lake-land, and the country was at its best.

Though the days were short, yet they were so beautiful while they lasted, and allowed of so much to be done, that Edgar and Adelaide scarcely regretted the rapid closing in of the evenings. Besides, to tell the truth, neither was an enthusiast for this kind of majestic scenery, though both professed to be enchanted as the right thing on a wedding-tour. It was the little farce each played to each and both failed to see through. The inns were luxurious, and not being overcrowded at this "back end of the season," the two handsome young people, with their shining luggage, gorgeous attire, manners of command and well-filled purses, were as minor royalties to the landlord and waiters, and the "best of everything" was brought like tribute laid at their feet.

They went everywhere, if the way was not too rough, the excursion not too long, and Adelaide would not be too much fatigued—saw everything in a leisurely, grandiose way, not giving themselves much trouble, but "doing the Lakes" with that conscientious indifference which makes the doing the main fact, and lets the enjoyment take care of itself. It was very beautiful, very quiet, very fascinating altogether; nevertheless, they would not be sorry, they thought, when the tour was over and they were settled at North Aston to begin life in earnest on their own plan and in their own domain.

They had worked gradually through

their self-appointed task, beginning with Coniston as their first centre and ending with dear Derwentwater as their last; and now they were returning home. It was time, for quite suddenly the weather had parted with its gorgeous brilliancy and had become dim and broken. The chill frosts of early October had killed the colors which a fortnight ago had been so intense, while the rising wind blew down showers of fluttering leaves, and the trees, which only so short a while ago glowed with crimson and shone with gold, were now mere naked boles, rayed with branches bleak and bare. The glory had disappeared, and it was indeed time to go home.

They were returning by way of Carlisle and the beautiful banks of the Eden. Edgar had a fancy, too, to see something of the country lying to the north of the mountains, that tract, rough and wild, at the back of Skiddaw, which no one ever sees. Besides the old couplet,

> Caldbeck and Caldbeck fells
> Is worth all England else—

as halting in grammar as it is inexact in statement—had always struck his imagination. What if that rough tract was a mineral El Dorado, and there was more than a chance of a fortune to be made by the pick and the borer? A friend of his, who had visited the country, had once said so, and Mr. Gryce had been heard to speak enthusiastically of the Roughton Gill Mines; also of some others wherein he had dropped much of that inherited gear which Sister Keziah kept in stockings and between the flock and the cover of her mattress. Edgar, a gambler in his own way like most men, had a fancy for abstract mining, and thought he should like to see this wild district with its hypothetical fortune lying a hundred feet below the surface. So they set off on Saturday, intending to drive from Derwentwater by Bassanthwaite and Ulldale to Caldbeck, where they would "rough it" for the night, and the next day, Sunday, take a short survey of the country, and then move a stage onward to pretty, leafy, restful Sebergham. It would be a pleasant ending to the tour, if only the weather would keep fair.

Things began fairly well for the travelers. They set out perhaps a little late, considering the time of year, but Adelaide was not an early riser, and they would be housed before the dead dark came on them. They got through the beautiful part of the drive under Skiddaw and through Bassanthwaite creditably enough, when Edgar, who had a good organ of locality, and believed in himself even more than he was justified in doing, saw, as he walked up the Hawse, that a short cut would take him over one of the outlying fells, whence he could strike the main road and meet the carriage after a practicable little détour which would be only a pleasant walk. He waited for the carriage to join him, and told Adelaide that he meant to cut across the fell—it was a mere trifle, not over two miles at the outside—and that he should meet her after she had gone about five miles round.

"I will come with you," said Adelaide. "You are sure it is not more than two miles?"

"I should say it is not quite that," he answered; "but," anxiously, "you had better not come, dear. The way may be rough, and you are not a very heroic walker."

"I am good for two miles," she said; "and really it is rather cold in the carriage. Besides, it is so dull sitting here alone. No, I will come with you, Edgar."

"As you like, of course," he said reluctantly, "but I do not vouch for anything. And I do not want to see you tired."

"I shall not be tired by a two miles' walk," she answered with her calm decision; and though he had proposed this diversion mainly to be a short time alone—the honeymoon closeness of companionship beginning to pall on him—for the sake of that politeness which he was too well bred to let drop even with his nearest relations, he was obliged to consent to her proposal to go with him, and even to feign the pleasure he did not feel.

It was now about one o'clock, and

after they had left the carriage and were ascending the fell, the day, which had not been too promising from the beginning, broke suddenly, as days sometimes do in the North. The sky, which had been always sunless and overcast, became thick and heavy with clouds; the wind dropped, but the air was damp and cold; and a mist crept up from the earth which gathered and thickened till soon the whole distance, and now things near at hand, were blotted out as if a shroud was being woven round the face and form of prostrate Nature. Colder grew the still and windless air, denser the rolling clouds of mist—so dense that it was as penetrating as rain; all landmarks were gone and path there was none: and there, alone on a rough fell-side, without a guide, a compass, or the faintest knowledge of their direction, caught in a mist through which they could not see two feet before them, Edgar and Adelaide transacted the last chapter of their honeymoon book of travels. No shouting brought back a human echo; once they heard the far-off barking of a dog and the bleating of some frightened sheep, and once they fell into the midst of a herd of startled cattle, whereat Adelaide screamed, and was nearly knocked down by one of the young steers starting off at full speed, scared on his side by her cries; now they came upon a bog, where they sank in an instant far over their ankles, and now they stumbled and slipped on a steep bank of shingle, lying there like one of the waste places of creation.

They did not know with what treacherous swiftness these mists gather up from the mountain-sides and roll along the moorlands, nor how utterly bewildering they are. Seen through them, no object has its proper value. A boulder is an unscalable mountain-wall, a sheep is as big as a cow, and a cow like an elephant, and you see the precipice only when it is yawning at your feet, and perhaps when it is too late to save the fatal step that plunges you into eternity. It was of no use to sit down now and to bewail because they had been caught in one of these treacherous uprisings and swathed with Nature in her shroud. They must struggle on in the hope to find a place of refuge somewhere: if only the poorest hut of a moorland hind, it would be welcome to them in their present straits; and they must do their best, go on, keep up both strength and courage, for the chance of finding such a shelter if nothing more satisfactory.

Adelaide had not said much. She was frightened, and now began to be tired; but she did not cry—to be seen. Scarcely either could she reproach her husband with their misfortunes. It had been his proposal certainly to walk across the fell, but her own will to accompany him, and one can hardly rate a man for the sudden uprising of a mountain-mist. Nevertheless, if she was silent she was more angry than sorrowful, and thought the reproaches which she did not say. As the hours passed her fatigue and fear increased, and her reticence and self-control slackened in proportion. She had held on bravely enough for about two hours, but now her courage gave way, and sitting down on a stone she declared that she could go no farther, that they were lost for ever, and that she should die here where they were; and why had Edgar been so foolish and so wicked as to walk across the fell when he knew neither the country nor the distance, and when he might have seen the mist coming up? Women in distress are never reasonable, and Adelaide was no better than her sex.

Edgar's methods of comfort went for very little. His wife was not enough in love with him personally to be content in that love or consoled by his caresses. And truly the situation was painful. There have been more deaths than one of those lost on the mountains and the moors, and why not they as well as others? Shoutings were in vain: there was nothing to be seen through this dense cloud enveloping everything, and no chance of being found by wandering hind or passing traveler. It was terrible. Wet to the skin, chilled to the marrow, lost in a thick white fog on a pathless fell-side moor, no wonder that poor Adelaide sat down and cried when her

powers were exhausted, and with them her endurance.

The day wore on, and the desolate bride more than once wished aloud that Edgar had never left his precious Leam Dundas to come to her. The glories of her state as mistress of the Hill were fading fast out of her mind, and to die on a wretched Cumberland moor as Edgar Harrowby's wife was not the kind of apotheosis which she coveted. She had wanted to be his wife for the solid goods that her wifehood would bring her, not for the silly transports of a lovesick girl mated to the man of her choice, and content with a desert if shared with him. That was all very well in story-books and poetry, but when you come to the concrete miseries of wet feet, thin boots, garments soaked through and through, rain, hunger, danger, distress and desolation, poetry flies into space and only the concrete miseries remain. Adelaide's appreciation of romance was limited, and just now she would have preferred the Yellow Dwarf in a luxurious castle to Edgar Harrowby and this cold, bleak, misty fell-side wilderness of bog and shingle.

Bitter thoughts like these, crudely spoken, coldly heard, did not help to make their miserable situation more tolerable; but they stripped off the disguise which had been carved out by fitness, and showed her own soul nakedly to herself, and to Edgar as well. It was like tearing away a beautiful veil from a hideous object to hear her bitter reproaches, her still more bitter regrets. It made Edgar feel as if all life had suddenly become a lie—as if he had lived until now in a dream, and had just awakened out of it; yet he recognized in himself a strange kind of indifference to the discovery, as if he had known all through his dream that he had not married Adelaide Birkett for love, nor yet believing in her love for him. He had dreamt that he had, but even in his dream he had not been persuaded.

Conventional fitness is a fine basis for a marriage in its own way, but then the marriage must remain in the conventional groove. When you come to love and the elemental facts of human nature, to possible death on a bleak fell-side, and to circumstances which do not admit of posturizing, then the conventional fitness is nowhere, and the gap where love ought to be, and is not, is the chief thing visible.

This miserable state of things lasted for hours that seemed an eternity, and then, as the evening came on, the mist lightened and gradually dispersed, so that Edgar could see where they were, and something of the surrounding country. They were on the top, or rather on the slope, of a fell. About two miles and a half below them lay a small cluster of houses—about half a mile off, one solitary square stone house, pitched straight before them on the descent. There was not another human habitation to be seen, save one, a little shieling on the ascent opposite to where they stood. Here, too, was a road — as Edgar conjectured, the road which led from this little hamlet below to Caldbeck and the world beyond.

"Can you exert yourself so much as to get to this house below us?" Edgar asked, speaking to his wife with a certain distant, chilling courtesy that made her wince more than his anger would have done.

Now that she was saved, and was not going to die on the fell-side, how sorry she was that she had let her true mind be seen! But men are foolish creatures in the hands of a clever woman; and she would, maybe, recover by tact all that she had lost by impatience. She put her hand over her eyes, as if to clear them. "Yes, with your arm," she answered with a deep sigh, suggestive of flinging off a weight and coming to herself. "I think I have been a little delirious," she then said plaintively, and again cleared her eyes and again sighed deeply.

"It has been a trying time," said Edgar coldly, offering his hand; "but come, you had better not sit longer. Let us take advantage of this break and make the best of our way to the house below."

He spoke quietly, but with the air of a man who does what he should out of self-respect, not love, and whose tenderness is not personal so much as official.

"How good you are!" said Adelaide prettily as she laid both her hands in his, and with pain and difficulty rose to her feet.

He made no answer, but drew her hand on his arm, and, always carefully tending her, always helping and protecting her, went in unbroken silence down the half mile intervening between them and Windy Brow. And as Adelaide was really stiff and tired and uncomfortable, she left off trying to coax him, and nursed her misery and displeasure in a silence as unbroken as his own.

It was dusk when they opened the broken gate hanging on one hinge, more like a gap than a guard, between the dilapidated fences, and passed up the weed-grown path lying by the side of the potato-patch and the cabbages, in full view of the windows of the sitting-room. As they came up Edgar's quick eyes saw a figure dressed in gray, with a dead-white face, pass swiftly by the window, and as he knocked at the door he heard an inner door hastily locked. Stories of murderers and maniacs flashed across Adelaide's mind, who also had seen the flitting figure and heard the hasty locking of the inner door. She clung to Edgar tremulously.

"Shall we venture in?" she whispered.

"Do you desire not?" he asked. "Shall we go farther? I am at your service."

She looked at him angrily. The cold politeness of his tone seemed to divorce them more than the rudest anger would have done, and she resented his resentment as an offence which might well annoy her.

"No," she said haughtily. "We will go in. You can take care of me if there is any danger."

"And if I have to take care of myself?" he asked, with a certain mocking accent that was, to say the least of it, unpleasant.

"Your first duty is to me," replied Adelaide with intense insolence and command.

Besides, though a coward, she was dead tired at the moment; and of the two fatigue was stronger than fear.

Red-armed, red-haired, touzled Jenny opened the door on the two battered, dripping strangers standing in the dusk without. She glowered at them as if they had been spirits fashioned by the mist, ghosts of the dead newly risen, or as if they had been brigands and burglars with designs on her own poor savings and her mistress's fabulous hoards.

"We have lost our way on the mountains: can you give us shelter?" asked Edgar in that rich voice which was one of his personal charms, and with the indescribable accent of an English gentleman accustomed to command.

"I'll ast t' mistress," was Jenny's reply, the door held cautiously ajar.

"Jenny!" cried Miss Gryce from some unknown depths, "what's astir? What's to do at the street door? Who are you chattering with? Come away, I say. It's no kind of night to be havering at the street door with a pack of idle vagabones. Come in, I say, and shut up."

"We have lost our way on the moor," said Edgar in a louder voice. "Cannot you give us shelter?"

And Adelaide's smaller treble added, "You must not shut the door. You must let us in."

At the sound of a woman's voice, Miss Gryce—who had a heart, though it had to be somewhat skillfully dug for—came out from the kitchen, where she had been spending the last hour in economizing the fraction of a farthing, and went to the door to see and judge of these newcomers for herself. And Leam up stairs in her own room, standing rigid, struck to stone by her bedside, heard Edgar Harrowby and Adelaide Birkett brought into the house and preparations set afloat for their fit shelter and reception.

Locked in her own room, she was left in peace. She was not of much use at any time when practical work was about, and since this strange weakness which had taken such possession of her she was even of less use than before. Miss Gryce therefore left her to herself, hoping that she slept. But she heard all that happened as clearly as if she had been on the spot. Her senses, sharpened to unnatural activity, told her everything that was said and done, as if no

such impediments as closed doors or hindering walls stood between them. She heard all that Edgar said by way of explanation to Miss Gryce—how that they had left the carriage at a certain part of the road to join it again by a short cut over the fell; how that then the mist had come up and enveloped them; and how that they had wandered, they knew not how, nor where, nor whence, till they had fallen on this place. She knew how Miss Gryce looked when she took snuff and their measure at the same time; and how Edgar looked—bold, commanding, manful—with Adelaide's fair, impassive face quietly accepting homage as her due, and care and protection as her right. And then she heard Adelaide's feet on the stairs, and knew when she was ushered into the room, next her own, where she was to take her rest and forget the fatigues and fears of her adventurous walk. She heard her fretful complaints and peevish bemoanings at the shortcomings of the accommodation, with Jenny's unintelligible replies, which only annoyed her more. She seemed to see as well as hear, and pictured the whole scene visibly—even to Jenny's kneeling on the floor and taking by main force the soaked boots from off the swollen, blistered feet. Then the bewailings ceased. Adelaide, comforted by food, slept, and Edgar down stairs waited for a while before he too should take his rest and forget for a few hours the new chapter of the heart which this walk in the mist had opened for his instruction. It was a chapter that he might have learnt slowly, by quiet, unexciting passages—a thing to grow into, like old age or dyspepsia, or perhaps a thing to never learn, concealed as it would be by habit. But now that he had read, had learnt, he could not forget; and the lines would be on his memory for ever, the text on which his life would be reasoned and transacted from now to the end of time.

Ah, Leam Dundas had loved him! Even that flattering, smooth-tongued Violet—venal Violet, whom he had left so suddenly these seven years ago, mad with jealousy and rage at what he believed to be her treachery—even she had loved him better than this. But Leam, proud, shy, loyal Leam—Leam, so full of fire, so single hearted and so honorable—how she had loved him! Oh that this black spot had never been on her young soul! that he might have loved her to her life's end as he had loved her for those few hours, and received from her for all time what she had given him then! So, thinking of Leam, beloved if accursed and abandoned, he fell into a light kind of slumber, sitting by the little window looking on to the broken gate and the rising ground beyond.

By this time the moon had risen white and wan. The thin vapor that yet hung about the frosty air was like a silver film of exquisite purity and delicate power, giving that ethereal, almost mournful beauty to everything on which it fell which one involuntarily associates with past sorrows and dead loves, with spiritual forms and a life beyond and higher than the coarse, material life of the world. The house was as still as the grave. Every one was in bed except Edgar and Leam, and all were sleeping but Leam.

Leam opened her mother's jewel-case. A fancy took her to touch once more the withered leaves of that spray of lemon-plant, crumbled now to dust, which Edgar Harrowby had drawn playfully over her face under the cut-leaved hornbeam on the lawn. She took it in her hands, pressed it against her face, kissed it as if it had life and feeling to respond to her own: then softly unlocked her door and stole down stairs.

She would see him once, just once, at a distance, reverently, humbly—not intruding on his notice, only worshiping at a distance at the shrine which she had been too vile to keep as her own. There was no harm in it. She did not imagine that Adelaide was his wife. She took her presence there with him naturally, as that of a favorite friend and companion; and yet if, as she believed, only as a friend and companion, a pang seized her to think how soon he had forgotten her even so far. And yet, again, what was she that she should not be forgotten? It was right and good that he had set her

aside so quickly. It was part of her punishment, and she must bear it. Adelaide, at the least, was free from crime, and Adelaide loved him. Enlightened by her own heart, she knew now that the reason why the rector's daughter had hated her was because she had loved Edgar: her hatred had meant jealousy of his love, not hatred of herself, Leam, apart from him. Yes, she loved him, but neither Adelaide nor any one loved him as did she herself, poor outcast Leam! But she was a leper and he was a king, and the gulf between them was impassable.

Yet she must see him just this once more, herself unseen: she must offer for one little moment the voiceless worship of her secret love, and then go back into the darkness for ever—the darkness closing very near about her now.

Noiseless as a falling shadow, she stole down stairs and came to the door of the sitting-room where Edgar was. It stood ajar. She pushed it cautiously open, and saw Edgar Harrowby sitting by the window, his head on his hand, dreaming of her. The candle had burnt itself out: only the veiled moonlight streamed over the fell and moor, and cast a pale reflection into the room. It showed his noble head resting on his hand, his face pale and beautiful as a tired god's. That beloved face! What pain and pleasure commingled it was to see him! She felt like one dead come back to earth watching the beloved, unseen of them and unsuspected. He was asleep. He would not feel her; he would not see nor know her; and, shrouded as she was in the shadow, he could not recognize her if even he should awake. She must go near to him and do him reverence. He was her god, and she was a sinner kneeling before him. She glided across the room, knelt for a minute by his side and bent her lips on the hand resting on his knee.

Edgar stirred drowsily in his sleep. What was this?—a touch, a perfume, a presence he seemed to remember? Who was there? He started up and roused himself. Did his eyesight mock him? Surely he saw a gray figure steal through the open doorway in the shadow, the scent of lemon-plant was about him, and on his hand—what was this? a tear? Whose?

But he heard and knew no more. His dreams had given him Leam—only his dreams! Then he sighed and shook himself clear of the haunting thought, and so wearily went up stairs; only a thin partition separating him, sleeping, from Leam Dundas, waking—Leam, who recognized then the fact, which she had not understood before, that he and Adelaide were man and wife.

Forgotten, discarded! so soon indeed! Poor Leam! Now for the first time she felt that the bitterness of her punishment almost equaled the shame of her guilt.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DAY OF REST.

THE church-clock sounded one, and the land had entered into the Sabbath of its rest, but there was no rest for Leam. She could not go to bed, for she dared not trust herself to sleep even if she could have slept, and she felt as if she should die of suffocation if she attempted to lie down. She sat in her quiet, tense way by the window, looking out on the moonlight and the frosty vapor; and then she turned again to her mother's jewel-case and took out the spray of lemon-plant—now turned to dust like her hopes, her happiness—intending to destroy it for ever; for how should she keep a love-relic of Adelaide's husband?—and in taking it out she lifted some of her mother's jewels.

That beloved mother! how vividly she remembered her, how passionately she loved her still! Perhaps she loved her even more in that she had committed this crime for her, in that she had sacrificed her life here and her soul hereafter for the false thought if the true feeling of guarding and protecting her. How well she remembered the day when she wore these coral beads, and that when she hung her—Leam's—little neck and arms with these strings of pearls! She heard her say again when

her father gave her these golden coins, and when her husband—that false-hearted Sebastian, mockery of a saint—had bought those rubies and those sapphires. For an hour and more Leam handled these jewels to chase away the consciousness of Edgar in memories of her mother, but at last the effort became more than she could bear, and the attempt died out in a sob. As she was putting away the sapphires she inadvertently touched the secret spring—which had got strained and weakened, and of the existence of which she had hitherto been ignorant—and thus dropped the division which hid the back of the case from the ordinary looker-in. There fell forward, with the division, a large and heavy green velvet pocket-book, with the initials V. E. H. embroidered in raised gold-work on the cover.

Surprised, she opened the book and came upon letters written in Edgar's handwriting to a certain "beloved Violet"—a certain Mrs. Harrington whom he called "love," and "life," and "darling wife," and "best beloved;" to a photograph of himself inscribed to his "darling Violet;" to a photograph of madame—not in weeds—subscribed also "darling Violet;" to one of himself and madame in a confiding attitude together; and to one of Fina, when she was about five months old, with "For her father, Edgar Harrowby," in madame's handwriting. She read the first letters half bewildered, scarcely understanding the full meaning of her discovery, not taking in what she read, but seeming to herself to be reading some horrible nightmare story. Then by slow degrees the truth came to her, burning itself into her brain, mounting in crimson to her cheeks—shame, horror, despair, all battling in her poor heart together as she grew to a clear understanding of madame's shameful secret and Edgar's hidden life.

And she! She had been really nothing to him—only a plaything, an occasion like the rest. First madame, then herself, now Adelaide! Is this the kind of thing men call love? It would seem so, judging from him and from her own father. But it was not what Leam, in the narrow limits of her ignorant purity, cared to dignify by that name. Love was something single, true and pure; and this— She had no word by which to call it. Neither her experience nor her vocabulary compassed the life and sentiments of such a man as Edgar Harrowby; nor could she understand how, with such a life, such sentiments, could exist any nobleness or manly worth. How could it have been? He, so good and great as he always seemed!—how could he have lived this hideous life of falsehood and treachery and deceit, pretending love now here, now there, first to one and then to another—pretending what he could not possibly feel?

These swift changes, these facile inconstancies, to a girl like Leam, so tenacious and single-hearted, were inexpiable crimes, and in such a man as to her imagination Edgar Harrowby was—knightly hero, noble saint, a very demigod—utterly incomprehensible. Edgar when she had confessed her crime to him had not felt more instinctively revolted than she did now when she discovered the reality of his career and laid bare his infidelities. Her brain seemed on fire, her heart was broken. The only thought possessing her was how to escape from the house where he was sleeping with his wife, not six feet from where she stood. She felt it a kind of dishonor to breathe the same air as himself. She knew too much to stay under the same roof with him, even as one apart, unknown and dead.

But, bad as he was, she loved him, and she would destroy this record of his guilt. No one but herself should ever know how deeply he had sinned. She would take that pocket-book far out on the fell, and bury it deep among the heather where man should never find it, and thus keep his secret safe and his name still honored. It was the last thing that she could do for him. She had loved him: for that love's sake she had sacrificed herself, and to keep his honor untouched had renounced him; and now she would shield him from discovery, and bury the evidence of his shame and sin

out of the sight and ken of all till the day of judgment should reveal it. Poor Leam! what grief and what delusion her two great loves had brought her!

The house was still buried in sleep. Once she heard Adelaide move uneasily on her pillow and moan, and once Edgar woke up with a start and a deep-drawn breath, like a man dreaming of pain. But these sounds soon dropped into absolute quiet, and the house fell again into the stillness of a tomb. The silver mist still hung like a veil between earth and sky, and the world without was as noiseless as the world within. For the second time Leam stole softly down the stairs, undid the bolts and bars, and passed out into the silence, the cold mist and the dim distance.

She did not know where she went nor when she meant to stop. She had but one feeling, to escape—but one design, to hide for ever the evidence of Edgar's crime. So she went on, stumbling wildly up the rough fell-road, when she halted and staggered and fell.

The morning broke soft and gray in a peaceful but not brilliant nor jocund Sabbath—a day which seemed like the subdued and tender echo of yesterday's bitterness of sorrow, bringing rest if not joy, and where, if there were no smiles, there were no tears. Haunted by his dreams, which had given him Leam always, Leam only, Edgar rose early and wandered about the place, taking the downward village-way; but save their own carriage standing by the door of the Blucher he saw nothing of any interest to him. He was glad, however, to see the carriage, so that they could leave their homely shelter and push on to Carlisle. He was ill at ease here. Ah, should he ever be more content? Had not he too parted with his summer, his sunshine, his happiness, and come into the gray gloom of eternal sorrow?

When he went back to the house he found Adelaide in deep distress about her flounces, torn, muddy, destroyed. Her soul lived in her wardrobe, dress was her life, and the destruction of her pretty traveling-gown was to her an infliction quite as terrible in its own way as the destruction to Leam of her ideal, or as had been to Edgar the discovery of her guilt. How could she wear such a rag as this? she said, weeping, when her husband entered her room. What a miserable journey they had had! what a day it had been altogether! And this dreadful house, this room! Look at the dirty windows, thick with dust and cobwebs —they could not have been cleaned for a year—the soiled curtains, the patched uncleanly counterpane; and, weeping afresh, her horrible gown. To Adelaide, speckless, spotless Adelaide, dirt and disorder were crimes in those about her: when they touched herself they were degradation so deep as to be on a level with immorality.

Edgar listened to her lamentations with a man's wonder at a woman's personal woes; then quietly told her that he had sent for the carriage, which had put up at the village, and that she would soon have her maid and her traveling trunk, and so be out of her millinery misery. This so far consoled her that she left off weeping, though she still bewailed herself, and held that she had been specially ill used of him and fate: she had her list of grievances off by heart, and she was minded that Edgar should learn to the full what she had suffered, and in that learning perhaps forget what she had inflicted.

It was strange how her comparatively small discomforts and not surprising peevishness jarred on her husband today. At one time he would have laughed, and comforted her with a man's good-humored superiority to such minor matters as lace and muslin. Perhaps he would have liked her all the better for her care of her person: it was so far flattering to him. But to-day her petulance wore another aspect altogether, and set him at odds with her more than before. It was like the intrusion of the petty miseries and mean annoyances of daily life into the solemn story of a tragedy, the tender strains of a threnody; as indeed it was, too truly.

Still perplexed at that vision of last night, and haunted by a mad idea which

he could not dominate—feeling the presence of Leam, though he knew that she was not here, could not possibly by any jugglery of events, as he believed, be here—Edgar asked their uncouth hostess carelessly at their homely breakfast if she had any one living with her beside the servant?

"Only a sort of a niece," said Keziah —"a kind of adopted daughter of my brother Emmanuel."

"Emmanuel! That is an unusual name," said Edgar.

"Ay, it's not a common sort, I reckon," she said. "Nor is our surname: Emmanuel Gryce isn't a name as is picked up at every street-corner." She laughed as she spoke. Like most Northerners, she had a large amount of family pride.

Edgar felt his face grow pale. "Does your brother Emmanuel Gryce live at North Aston?" he asked.

"Ay, that's where he is just now, though he's a sad, rambling sort of a body, and never bides long anywhere. But that's his home just now. Do you happen to know him?"

"Yes," said Edgar. "We live at North Aston, my wife and I. And your niece, his adopted daughter—is her name Gryce too?"

"No, she's one Leonora Darley," said Keziah, suspecting nothing. "I don't know where he fished her up, nor who are her forebears, but that's the name she goes by."

"Is she in the house?" he asked, looking down on his plate, not daring to trust his eyes, scarcely able to command his voice; Adelaide's cold blue eyes looking at him half in surprise, half in suspicion.

"Yes, she is in the house sure enough, abed," answered Keziah. "She is only in bad health, isn't the poor lass, and when she's a mind to sleep we let her. She's not oft so late as this, and I'll be rousing her by and by."

"What is the matter with her health?" he asked.

"Eh, who knows! Your bits of lasses are always ailing," said Keziah. "Mayhap some love-trouble—most like. She's close, though, and has not told me aught."

"You are wonderfully inquisitive about this young lady," said Adelaide with a forced laugh. "What interest can a perfect stranger have for you?"

But she too felt uneasy. It was not that she formulated Leam distinctly: nevertheless, there was a dim kind of fear, a nameless suspicion, and the image of Leam like a shadow in the background. She was not dead; this dreadful woman was the sister of that strange Mr. Gryce of Lionnet; and there was an adopted daughter of evidently unknown antecedents in bad health living with her and invisible. So far she could piece together the fragments of the mystery, and so far she was uneasy. How she longed to get away from this place! She had felt there was danger in it when she passed through the gates and stood by the door. Would the carriage never come? Should they never be able to escape?

No more, however, was said or done. Edgar held his peace. Being a man, a woman's sneer could control him, and the carriage, which had stopped at Monk Grange overnight, as we know, soon after this came up to take them on their journey. To Adelaide's unspeakable relief, they got in without more being said of Miss Leonora Darley, Mr. Gryce's adopted daughter; and they set off, leaving Miss Gryce so much impressed by their grandeur, and touzled Jenny so much taken up by their liberality, as to cause both to forget poor Leam's continued absence, strange as it was to her habits.

But Edgar regretted that they went without seeing this adopted niece. It would have set his mind at rest if he had seen her. Now the moonlight vision that had come to him between sleeping and waking, that scent of lemon-plant, that tear on his hand, would ever remain a mystery, an undying fear and a lifelong pain.

They wound slowly up the rough, steep fell-side road, and presently Edgar, to lighten the load and also to free himself from Adelaide's presence for a time, got out to walk up the hill, and soon drew far ahead of the lumbering carriage. As he walked on he saw at a distance something gray by the wayside. Backed by the russet-brown of the dying bracken

and the gold of the late gorse, that something gray came out in strange distinctness. Was it a stone jutting out into the roadway? No, it was not a stone: it looked more like a human figure than a rock.

He quickened his pace, walking rapidly. The village bells were chiming up from the church at the fell-foot, calling the weary workers to the Sabbath Day devotions, the peaceful service of the day of rest; the scattered sheep on the fell-side were bleating to each other, the faithful collies barking and the distant cattle lowing. But all these sounds were far off and subdued, mere echoes of the life afar: near at hand it was absolute stillness—a stillness in fit accord with the sunless sky and the gray, dim, sombre day. Edgar walked fast, ever faster, and now had distanced the carriage by half a mile or more. He came nearer, nearer to the figure lying on the road, and now so near that he knew it to be a woman, young, slight, with dark hair—a woman of condition, not a tramp nor a peasant.

A little child from a hind's hut near stood beside that prostrate figure. The freshening wind blew back the sunny curls from the wondering rosy face and drove into a little cloud the clean white Sunday frock with the bits of blue about the arms to mark the mother's loving pride in her child. Her dimpled hands were full of withered fern and dying heather, of ox-eye daisies and golden-headed ragwort. She had scattered handfuls over the woman lying asleep there by the wayside, but now she was standing wondering why she laid so still, and did not awake when she was called.

Edgar, breathless, heart-struck, knowing full well what was before him, strode up to the sleeping woman. He knelt on one knee and gently lifted the hidden face, the helpless body, pressing to his bosom tenderly, reverently, the dear head of his dead love. As he moved the body he drew her hand from the heather where it had been thrust, and took from it, clutched tight and rigid with death, the green velvet pocket-book which he had given seven years ago to Violet Cray, when they lived in St. John's Wood under the name of Harrington.

He took it from her hand and concealed it in his own breast, hiding it just in time from Adelaide, coming up in the carriage.

She stopped and got out to find him thus—kneeling on one knee, supporting the dead body of Leam Dundas, holding to his breast the pale dead face wet with his passionate tears, unresponsive to his despairing caresses.

Adelaide laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. "Is this manly?" she said in a cold voice. "You knew that she was here."

"Do not speak of her," he answered bitterly, turning away his head. 'She loved me, and she is dead."

"Dead!" she echoed, as much displeasure as natural horror in her voice.

It was an offence to one like Adelaide that the girl whom she had always hated, but who had been in a sense her equal and companion, should have died with this tragic unconventionality—a poor lost creature lying by the wayside like one of the waifs of the world for whom is neither love nor care, neither respectability nor decency. When people of Leam's condition die, they should die in their beds, decently as befits the rational and well-conducted, not out on a wild fell-top, drenched with the mists of night and stiffened stark with its frosts. She made a movement as if she would have spoken, but Edgar, who read her heart, thrust her almost savagely aside. "Silence!" he said. "You shall not blaspheme her. She was true and faithful, and if she sinned she has suffered, and will be forgiven. She loved me, but she lies here, and—you are my wife!"

He bent his head and again kissed the pale face on his breast, then lifted her reverently to place her in the carriage.

As he stood up with his pitiful burden the church-bells ceased ringing, and Alick, in his place, began the Morning Service with these words:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

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